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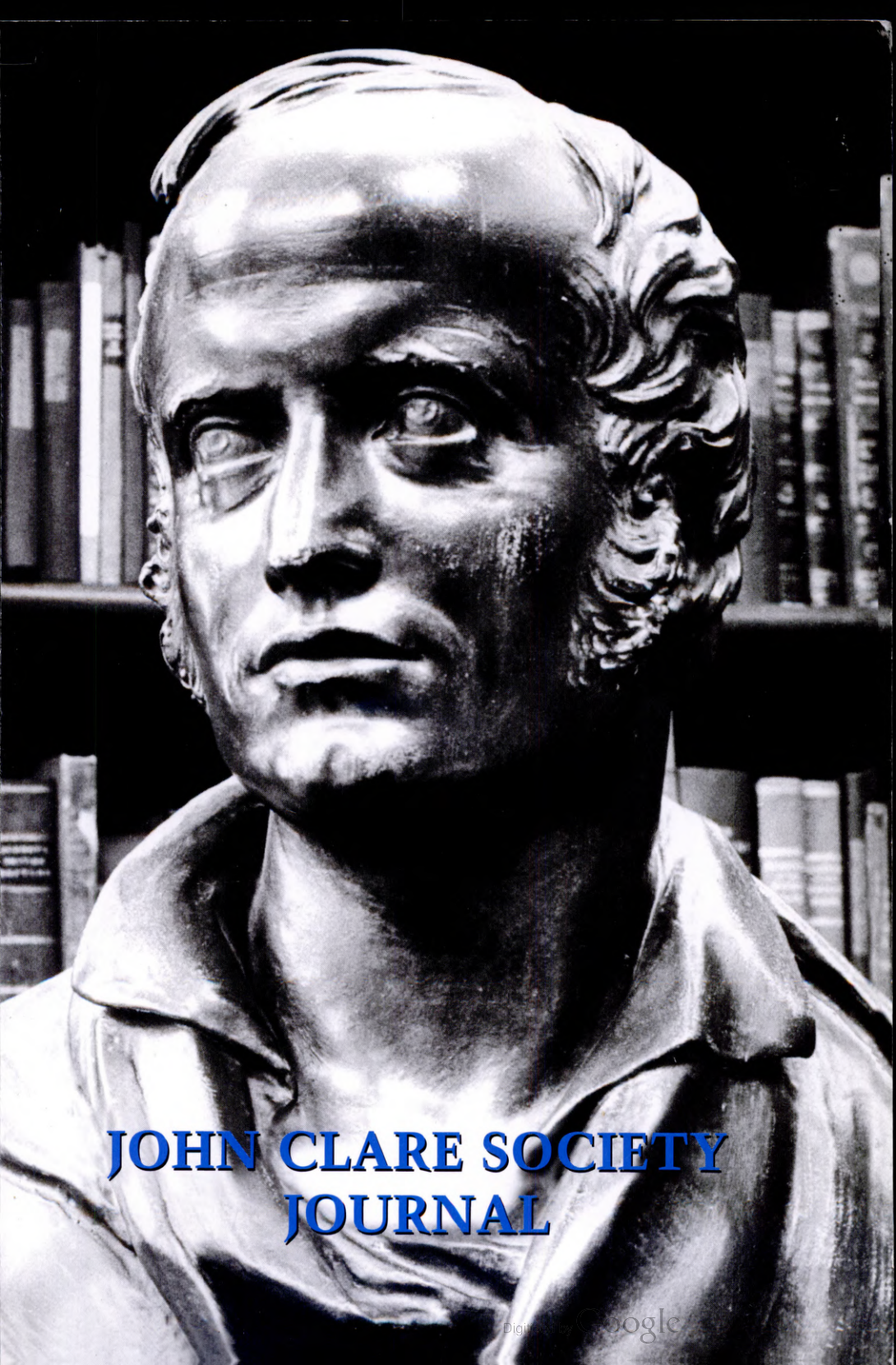

# JOHN CLARE SOCIETY JOURNAL

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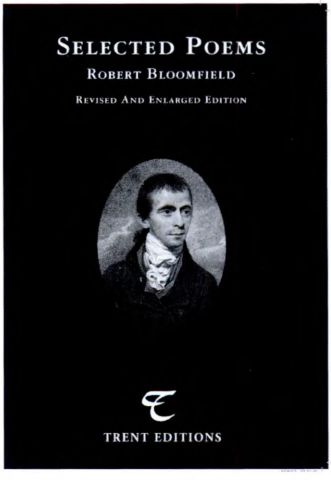


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# The John Clare Society Journal

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published annually to reflect the interest in, and approaches to,
the life and work of the poet John Clare.

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# Editorial

Since his first edition in 1992, Professor John Goodridge has worked tirelessly as the editor of this journal to ensure it secured a global reputation as the most important place to publish new ideas about, and creative responses to, Clare. John has maintained the highest standards of scholarly writing, whilst ensuring the journal remains accessible for as broad a readership as possible. All along he has affably encouraged writers, poets and artists from all walks of life to be included here. I am sure readers will join me in thanking John for the fabulous service he has carried out for Clare enthusiasts around the world.

Fortunately for us all, John has closely overseen this transitional edition. He has also agreed to stay involved as a member of the new Advisory Board. This Board will provide the journal with anonymous refereeing of submitted articles, together with advice for the editor. The Board draws on expertise from around the world, in all sorts of areas related to the study of Clare. Bob Heyes, a fount of knowledge and advice, thankfully stays on as Reviews Editor.

In this edition, Scott McEathron casts light upon an unexplored relationship Clare had with poet John Atkin. Scott Hess discusses modes of presenting 'framed' nature and how Clare diverged from picturesque cultural trends. Sculptor Tom Bates details the lives of the brothers Behnes (the front cover of course features the portrait of Clare by younger brother Henry). Sarah Weiger considers the complexities and idiosyncrasies of Clare's presentation of 'taste'. And finally the transcription of the *Dublin Inquisitor*'s review of *Poems Descriptive* will, I hope, be new to most readers of Clare. It launches a new section of the journal which will present primary materials and miscellanies not yet widely disseminated.

Caroline Jackson-Houlston generously provided the sketches of birds (pp. 58, 65, 72 and 86). The Royal Collection kindly gave its permission to reproduce a photograph of the 1829 William Behnes bust of Princess Victoria (p. 48). The images of the hapless Doctor Syntax come from Thomas Rowlandson's 1815 print (p. 30), and from an edition of the *Tour* published in 1844, and illustrated by 'Alfred Crowquill'—a pseudonym used by brothers Charles and Henry Forrester (pp. 23, 24 and 26).

*Simon Kövesi*
*Oxford Brookes University*

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# Clare, John Atkin, and *The Parish*

*Scott McEathron*

Early in 1820, a few days following the publication of *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*, John Clare opened the 'first letter [he] ever received from an admirer'.[1] This communication was one of three sent to Clare over a period of ten months by a Nottinghamshire schoolmaster and aspiring poet named John Atkin. Now held at the British Library, Atkin's letters are important in providing an early, close-up example of the tensions surrounding ambition, professional notoriety, and personal trust that would come so perpetually to weigh upon Clare's career.[2] Though we do not have Clare's end of the correspondence, it is evident that he greeted Atkin's letters—which are almost shocking in their presumption and aggressive familiarity—with considerable suspicion. For while artistic exchange and intellectual camaraderie were Atkin's stated goals, the letters plainly suggest that he was ultimately seeking Clare's mentorship or patronage. At the time, Atkin was busily nurturing his own nascent literary career, composing a narrative poem titled *Jonah Tink* that he would eventually publish in 1823. Atkin's zeal to publish his poem may be related to the apparent cessation of his correspondence after three letters, and there are hints that, initial declarations of literary fellowship notwithstanding, Atkin had decided to move on, possibly because by that point he had perceived Clare as unwilling, or unable, to provide the help he sought.

*Jonah Tink* itself is important to this account, for its premise of social grievance sheds light on Atkin's self-presentation in his letters to Clare. The larger implications of their exchange, however, pertain to Clare's own work. Atkin specifically touts *Jonah Tink* as a social satire of the sort he hopes Clare will be disposed to understand and approve: the story of how a poor man's rise to landed wealth brings with it an automatic increase in social standing that, in the minds of his new admirers, has nothing to do with the personal merits that actually govern his success. Atkin views the differential treatment of the protagonist



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'in his low, and High Estate' as 'a counterpart of what we every day see in our progress through life', implicitly including Clare in the generic 'we'. That this truism would have struck Clare as rather thin is suggested by his own long poem *The Parish, A Satire* (written *c.* 1820-27, pub. 1985), which subordinates the simple notion of rank-privilege to a more broadly elaborated account of how cut-throat social grasping taints the working lives of some, the religious beliefs of others, and the well-being of all. Clare's picture of village hypocrisy is far more damning than Atkin's, and his satiric net is cast well beyond the standard social climbers, taking in farmers, tradespeople, lay preachers, and—tellingly—provincial windbags on the lookout for fame and patronage. While one hesitates to claim Atkin himself as the original for the latter archetype, it is no stretch to suggest that Clare saw in Atkin's attitude to literature an instance of a larger problem: the phenomenon whereby a limited editorial imagination—advertised as satire but really devolving to mere boosterism—perpetuates the moral confusion it purports to mend. Beyond condemning venality, Clare follows Pope, whom he cites in the poem's epigraph, in having *The Parish* comment intermittently on the nature of true and false satire; and, like Pope, he declares his willingness to face the recriminations of those in power. By extension, then, Atkin's letters are important for helping to illuminate what Clare was reacting against, or resisting, as he formed his own principles of poetry as a vehicle of social advocacy.

It is evident from the first letter, dated 19 January 1820, that Atkin was a regular reader of Richard Newcomb's newspaper the *Stamford Mercury*, which in the days and weeks prior had mentioned Clare and his forthcoming volume three times.[3] Spurred by an item of 14 January announcing the publication of *Poems Descriptive*, Atkin opens with a request for a copy, couching a cash-on-delivery proposal in a coy reference to Thomas Gray's 'Elegy': 'as I am an ardent admirer of rural Poetry, and have myself Composed a few pieces, perhaps to blush unseen, I shall be extremely obliged if you will send a volume, directed to me, in Mr. Newcomb's Newspaper Parcel ... and when it arrives, I will give orders for you to receive its Price of Mr. Newcomb'.[4] Whether or not this offer struck Clare as unusual, it is clear from subsequent writings that the closing paragraphs of the letter, in which Atkin turns to a formal statement of introduction, were vexing:



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> I am a joiner by trade, and received a superficial Education at the School, in my dear native village, of which School I am now the Master, as I have several relatives, and Friends, Poets, whom I correspond with, I should be proud to enroll your name in the list of Friends, as one whose Correspondence would give me pleasure.—I am Composing a Poem which will contain about a thousand Lines, several well informed individuals inform me, it has merit, and advise me to Publish it by Subscription, should I not sell the M.S. I perhaps may accede to their request—. I shall feel much diffidence in submitting it to the Press, as those snarling Critics, may by one dash of the Pen, sink me below the Centre of Gravity, from whence I may experience much difficulty in extricating myself. You will smile when you have read this droll epistle, and fancy I am a comical old bit of a Poet, or not Poet at all.
>
> It is very fortunate that I have got to the end of my Paper, or my Pen might be sliding into other subjects, and leave me no room, to subscribe myself
>
> Your (shall I say?) Friend,
> John Atkin[5]

While the elements of this self-portrait are conventional, its airy tone undercuts its gestures towards self-effacement, with Atkin's blend of flattery and self-regard perhaps captured best in the phrase 'I should be proud to enroll your name in the list of Friends, as one whose Correspondence would give me pleasure'. His general approach is to impose intimacy, or to treat it as a virtual *fait accompli*, a strategy also visible in the most confusing section of his letter (not quoted above), an earlier paragraph in which Atkin also refers to the *Mercury*'s story of 14 January.

That story had featured a long, anonymous letter offering Clare literary advice and encouragement—something like an open letter to the new poet. Signed only 'A.B.', it was introduced as being 'from a benevolent person near London, who has anonymously sent a present of money to the Northamptonshire Peasant-Poet, John Clare, and has given in the letter some advice of more value than the money'.[6] Aware that this piece had to some extent made Clare a public commodity, Atkin invokes it for his own purposes, praising the sage guidance it offers while implying that he himself could offer Clare similar intellectual aid: 'I was very much gratified by [its] perusal', Atkin writes:



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> [I]t is fraught with the best advice, and expressed in such elegant Language, that I doubt not but it will give an additional Impulse to your mind, stimulate you to pursue with alacrity the bent of your Genius, and
>
> In the rural, pleasant shades,
> Woo the sweet celestial maids.[7]

We can infer from Atkin's second letter, dated 25 February 1820, that Clare was taken aback by the schoolmaster's boldness. 'Friend', Atkin begins, '[Your letter] arrived safe, and in it I observe you have expressed the diffidence you feel in Corresponding with a Stranger'.[8] In what follows, Atkin's attempts to address this 'diffidence' may seem ill-judged, more likely to increase Clare's wariness than to damp it, but in assessing his remarks it is crucial that we set aside our own *ex post facto* perception of Clare as one of the great poets of Romanticism and of Atkin as an obscure footnote in literary history. For while Clare in early 1820 had a newly minted public persona, Atkin was, relatively speaking, the one with the social graces. Established in a profession, possessed of an elegant hand and a cultivated writing style, Atkin occupied that sparsely populated social stratum between squirearchy and peasantry that, in small villages like Helpston and North Muskham, connoted education and rising respectability. So while it is likely that Clare felt some annoyance at Atkin's hard-charging presumption, it is also possible that he was genuinely anxious that the correspondence Atkin proposed would quickly expose him as an uncouth, unpracticed writer.

Atkin's second letter is long and breaks neatly into two sections. The first focuses on assurances to Clare that they are social equals who share a common interest in the life of the mind:

> Friend, North Muskham, Feb. 25. 1820.
>
> Yours arrived safe, and in it I observe you have expressed the diffidence you feel in Corresponding with a Stranger; let me confess to you, that I experienced the same, when first I attempted an Epistolary Correspondence with Persons whom I imagined were possessed of Abilities superior to myself. To a person of real merit this will be always the Case; but suffer me to suggest to you that it is chiefly by a Writing Correspondence, that Persons rise to Eminence in their Profession, and though you may feel great reluctance in submitting your thoughts upon Paper, you may rest <assured that> no real Friend will



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> ever wound the feelings of another, by an exposure of the Errors he may discover in a letter. I told you before that I had received but a superficial Education, and therefore am not well qualified to judge of my own Compositions, much more to criticise the Works of others.
>
> Should you wish me to point out any Errors my Judgment may discern in yours, I will readily accede to your request, not with an invidious sneer, but with the candor of a real disinterested Friend.
>
> After you are Fatigued by long intense thinking would not a Friendly Letter, collect your scattered thoughts, and arouse your drooping Spirits? I am of an Opinion that it would,—when I am quite spent by laborious teaching, a Letter fraught with the best wishes from a Man I esteem, rallies the depression of Spirits, improves the Mind, and gives inexpressible pleasure—I admire your Poems, but let me remind you that reading the Poetry of others, causes Imitation, for when Ideas strike our minds very forcibly, we are sure to delineate the same, tho' in rather different Language.—In the poem I am Composing, and one of yours, there is a coincidence of Ideas, which could not occur thro' imitation, and not only the Ideas, but the Words are precisely the same.—When I found myself gifted with Poetical talents, I resolved to read no Poetical Works, unless by chance they came in my Way.—I never bought before yours, a Poetical book!—The Diaries, and Companion enjoyed my attention. I became their ardent admirer, and they are yet my Winter's Amusement. I often receive a letter from an unknown Diarian Friend, desiring my Opinion on the mystical meaning of the Subjects proposed, and the day which brought yours, brought one also from a Person residing near Loughbro',[9] a perfect Stranger to Atkin[.][10]

Perhaps in an effort to make this last reference less inscrutable, Atkin sent with his letter a gift copy of the *Companion* to which he referred. Even so, Clare could not have realized the extent to which, in citing these periodicals, Atkin was identifying the very touchstones of his unusual intellectual history. The *Ladies' Diary* (which Atkin's grandmother read 'for upwards of sixty years') and the *Gentlemen's Mathematical Companion* (featuring 'mathematics, poetry, remarks, new enigmas, rebuses, charades, queries') were the annual miscellanies Atkin would later describe as his gateways to the world of print culture, and, specifically, to the practice of writing verse, which he initially



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conceived as an exercise in rhythm, design, and logic.[11] This journey is described in 'To the Reader', the introductory poem in Atkin's *Jonah Tink* volume, where Atkin remembers standing 'transfix'd, / With thoughts in hopes and wonder mix'd' while his grandmother solved the *Diary*'s riddles and enigmas. Fired by the seeming magic of these constructions, he began, falteringly, to study them himself:

> Now from that time, I this can say,
> I valu'd reading more than play;
> The Diaries which she then possess'd,
> Inspir'd with hope my youthful breast,
> And always when the Diary came,
> I wish'd that it could boast my name;
> But Fancy whisper'd, what can you
> Compose, who cannot read it through?
> I felt the cut, but still thought I,
> When I'm a man, I'll often try,
> The words together I will mingle,
> And make them with each other gingle.
> [. . .]
> Sure I may say, my mind that time,
> Receiv'd its bias for a rhyme,
> And ev'ry winter from that year
> The Diaries my companions were,
> Enigmas I could soon explain,
> The mystic veil, could rend in twain,
> Close study many have me cost,
> And sleep for sev'ral nights I've lost;
> Yet such were the impressions then,
> They gave a spur to thoughts and pen;
> That at this time I frankly own
> It is into a habit grown.
> As I with knowledge was endu'd,
> The subject was again renew'd,
> Great many lines I then did write,
> Which ne'er have seen, nor will see light:
> But not deterr'd, I tried again,
> Producing verses from my brain;
> By study, perseverance, too,
> I brought a few good lines in view,
> And at the last, the anxious bard,
> Obtain'd a prize, as his reward. (ll. 77-88; 95-116)



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His attempts, then, were finally successful, and in a footnote he proudly details the haul of literary prizes earned through his contributions: 'Books gained by the author in 1811.—Twelve Mathematical Companions, and two Pocket Books. In 1812—Four Pocket Books. In 1817—Twelve Companions, In 1819—Six Ladies' Diaries. In 1821—Nine Gentlemen's Diaries'.[12]

This winsome account serves to humanize Atkin, and suggests that his testimonials to the joys of intellectual exchange, whether via 'unknown Diarian Friends' or other newfound literary acquaintances, were sincere enough even if awkwardly opportunistic. His claim regarding Clare's *Poems Descriptive*—'I never bought before yours, a Poetical book!'—comports strangely with his pleas for a clerisy of poets, but is meant to buttress the notion that he and Clare share a special connection: 'In the poem I am Composing, and one of yours, there is a coincidence of Ideas, which could not occur thro' imitation, and not only the Ideas, but the Words are precisely the same'. Suggesting that his bond with Clare transcends mere 'imitation', Atkin presses the point in the margin of his letter, where he quotes a line describing a gossip from *Jonah Tink* that is indeed strikingly similar to a line from *Poems Descriptive.* As if expecting Clare to read his mind, however, he presents the comparison in a cryptic shorthand that may well have left Clare baffled.[13]

This mention of *Jonah Tink*, still at this time a work in progress, then allows Atkin to open a more substantive discussion of poetic objectives in the second part of his letter:

> The Subject of my Poem, is Jonah Tink. It is rather a satirical one. It exposes and criticises the conduct of many characters who do not act according to the station of life they are placed in. I composed 200 lines in 6 Hours and my Motto, is
>
> The Cap amongst the Crowd is gone,
> The Man it fits, he puts it on—
>
> I am doubtful whether you will comprehend the Substance of it, by a short extract, but it is the History of a Man who by the favours of Fortune has risen into Notice [.] It describes the scenes of Advancement, the difference of sentiments expressed, and the conduct of individuals towards him in his low, and High Estate, and is a counterpart of what we every day see in our progress through life.—Should we ever become personally acquainted, (which I trust we shall) it would be a



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> delightful exercise for me to read over my performance, and I fancy, you would hear with pleasure the different circumstances, and occurrences therein mentioned
>
> [Here he inserts two passages from *Jonah Tink*, totaling 40 lines.]
>
> These are a few of the numerous scenes depicted in the Poem.—give me your opinion on them, in your next, and any other remarks will be pleasantly received.—I have enclosed a Companion as a Present from Mrs. A, she being so fortunate as to obtain in that year one of the Prizes.—Direct your Letters to J. Atkin, as I have a Father, & a Brother in the Village, where resides your
>
> sincere Friend John Atkin[14]

It is not necessary to dwell at length on Atkin's self-promotion, which is perfectly straightforward. But when his remarks are placed alongside the completed version of *Jonah Tink* itself, we begin to see more clearly the social vision—or, one might say, the divided social consciousness—that underwrites his poetic aspirations.

Atkin's advertisement of the poem as a 'satirical' account of social conduct—a claim that he elaborates in *Jonah Tink*'s published Preface—is curious. Initially the poem seems less a satire on the misdeeds of its various characters than a pure fantasy of social advancement. The title character, whose name is so obviously an anagram of Atkin's that one assumes readers were meant to take notice,[15] begins life as the son of a cotter, but over the course of 2,300 lines becomes, first, the bailiff of a wealthy landowner, then the steward for an aged 'Lady rich and great' (l. 477), and, finally, through the terms of her will, a Lord with a clerical living at his disposal. (Jonah later turns down the opportunity to become a magistrate and, in the process, a baronet, so as to avoid being 'a vassal to the throne' (l. 1414]). Throughout the poem, Jonah's triumphs over dandies and gossips, as well as his resistance to the invidious modern spirit of 'pelf', are portrayed as manifestations of his virtue and merit. His setbacks, such as they are, are only momentary. Though his first employer (a 'squire-et') originally rejects the low-born Jonah as a suitor to his daughter Susan, summarily dismissing him from the house, in no time 'Dame Fortune' smiles (1. 476) and Jonah returns bearing a new situation and an annual income of £400. Susan's father suddenly is not only willing, but brought to a philosophical epiphany:



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The Squire-et mused with down-cast eye,
At length made Jonah this reply,
'I do your meaning understand,
You now aspire to Susan's hand;
Her heart you gain'd sometime ago,
But then the truth I did not know;
I thought your arrogance was great,
To even think of my estate;
But since that time I've found 'tis true,
That then I undervalu'd you;
Your mode of managing my grounds,
Gain'd me a many hundred pounds,
I should have sent for you again,
But pride of heart did me restrain;
[. . .]
Since now I have my error seen,
I will inform you what I mean,
As you each other do regard,
I will your merit thus reward,
For on the very day that she
In Hymen's bands, your bride shall be,
In your possession shall be found,
The sum of full ten thousand pounds'. (ll. 575-588; 595-602)

This comically sanguine account of goodness triumphant is typical of a narrative also notable for the gradual disintegration of its internal structure. Jonah's meteoric rise dominates the first half of the poem, but from that point on he fades rapidly into the background, as Atkin makes ever-longer essays into social commentary, criticizing the Madras system of schooling, luxury and social-climbing, spoiled children, negligent housewives, dandies and 'squads',[16] absentee landlords and rectors, corrupt lawyers and judges, and lying gamekeepers, all of whom embody what Atkin sees as a contemporary zeitgeist in which superficiality, acquisitiveness, and moral turpitude hold sway at the expense of traditional English values. The upstart 'spruce Apothecary', to cite only one example, 'has a signed diploma got / How he obtain'd it, this says not' (ll. 1539; 1544-45). Impatient with 'his servile state / Behind the counter', the youngster 'Usurps the old Physician's place' (l. 1542) and proceeds on a campaign of robbing the citizenry of both money and common sense, while making them slaves to his bogus neo-professionalism:



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> If he but once prescribe for you,
> He'll stomach empty, pocket too,
> For he a figure can define,
> And turn a cypher to a nine;
> He bleed and blister, purge you till
> He's made you weak, and sick, and ill,
> [. . .]
> And says, if you would now get well,
> Perform and do what I you tell;
> But if you my advice neglect,
> To suffer more, you may expect. (ll. 1586-1591; 1598-1601)

In this passage and in similar diatribes against lawyers and judges, housewives and 'man-midwives' (p. 95), we see what Atkin meant in saying to Clare that *Jonah Tink* 'exposes and criticises the conduct of many characters who do not act according to the station of life they are placed in'. Yet his anger regarding this perceived breakdown in social roles, especially as it contributes to the suffering of the poor, increases so markedly in the second half of the poem that it comes to resemble a more straightforward radicalism: 'If life was trade, and most could buy, / *The Rich would live, the Poor would die*' (ll. 1317-18). The voices of the frustrated Burkean and the angry leveller begin to compete, both arguably emerging from what Atkin, in the poem's Preface, describes as the central social problem needing redress:

> [S]ome men are the same in every change of situation[;] unstable is the mind of man, interest, base sordid interest has such dominion over him, that it becomes his perpetual motion; and whenever this dastardly principle envelopes the mind of a human being, gross partiality is very often observed to govern his whole conduct. It is against such, that this Poem is chiefly directed, and should only one be convinced of the error of his way, and reform, the Author will not think his labours have been in vain. (*Jonah Tink*, p. iv)

The vague referent of the 'such' against which 'this Poem is directed' testifies to the haziness of Atkin's thinking about class distinctions. *Jonah Tink* could be described as an anthem to social mobility which pauses frequently for nostalgic appreciations of a fixed hierarchy and *noblesse oblige*, even as its gentrified protagonist scoffs at the trappings of privilege. In the hands of a Fielding or a Goldsmith, these mutually qualifying purposes



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would be kept in a tight enough relationship to ensure, say, a wry composite-sketch of the squirearchy, or a new appeal for social cohesion that takes modern obstacles into account. But in Atkin's case, we get clearly divergent responses to the erosion of traditional village life, one a hopeful fantasy, the other an angry screed. He simultaneously insists that Jonah's rise in stature is a reasonable and desirable outcome of his intrinsic merit, and that anyone else's expectation of a similar reward—whether bestowed by Jonah himself, or by another magical benefactor—would be craven and unworthy.

Perhaps oblivious to his own mixed messages—or perhaps bent on showing the range of his commentary—Atkin provides Clare two loosely related excerpts from what would become the middle section of *Jonah Tink*. The first depicts the new notice paid Jonah by the gentry as he walks down the street—such that, as an up-and-coming steward with some dispensing power over the estate he manages, he is predictively dubbed 'Esquire' (ll. 867-82).[17] The second excerpt, somewhat jarringly, begins 'In former times, when Catholics / Brought here from Rome, their Popish tricks ...' (ll. 991-2), but goes on to say that despite being an engine of persecution, the Catholic Church did redistribute some of its wealth—'They out of this prodigious store, / *Employ'd, and clothed, and fed the poor*' (ll. 1001-2)—whereas many post-Reformation 'English Pastors' (l. 1006) set a precedent whose ill effects are still felt: 'They eager grasp'd the mighty store, / *But left the Parishes—the Poor!!*' (ll. 1013-14).

Clare would have had no way of guessing the lengthy chain of associations Atkin intended as the bridge between these two passages. The intervening hundred lines treat the following developments: Jonah's fair-minded consideration of tenants' competing claims; his old-fashioned practice of relieving poor cottagers directly (rather than shunting them off to the care of the parish); the bequest that brings him his estate, along with a title and control of the clerical living; his mindfulness of how the virtuous old Rector has been subjected to a death-watch by colleagues eager for advancement; and finally his refusal to offer the Rectorship to any wrongful tithe-taker. After the quoted condemnation of clerical greed, the storyline continues with Jonah's decision to elevate, instead, a long-suffering curate from a nearby estate; some fifty lines then celebrate Jonah's generosity and the curate's bewildered gratitude. Today, our narrator opines, we might well fear the collusion of such a clergyman, once installed, with an



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oppressive magistracy; but in the idealized past, 'The pulpit was the place, they knew, / Where Rectors should their duty do; / And preach salvation, faith, and grace, / Unto the fallen human race' (ll. 1123-6). In a cumbersome way, then, Atkin does tie the points in the excerpted passages to one another and to the ensuing discussion (l. 1135 ff.) of Jonah's improvements and reforms as a landowner, and the motif of a 'store' of wealth is also carried through: 'Great many of the lab'ring poor / Enjoyed a portion of his store' (ll. 1137-8). Overall, however, the terms of praise and blame seem to be compromised, rather than solidified, by Atkin's pseudo-history of societal decline.

One wonders whether Atkin's indignant evocation of the Poor Laws might have come to Clare's mind while he was engaged in the more sustained anthropology of *The Parish*. But, even if so, the differences between Clare's treatment of the idea and Atkin's are significant. It will suffice for the present discussion to note two such differences, each with broad implications. First, though clerical venality is targeted by Clare—along with the kinds of embezzlement, fraud, and graft to be seen in several other professions—he does not explicitly link this problem with the inadequacy of parish provisions for the poor. Instead, he focuses on the ironic tendency of labouring-class church-goers to harm themselves and one another in the evangelical settings intended to give them a voice. Clare's multiple portraits of born-again demagogues, neglecting their day jobs for the addictive thrill of separating their peers into groups of sheep and goats, serve partly as an attack on sectarianism, but more ruthlessly expose pharisaical behaviour as a cross-class phenomenon. Clare's method of invective is not only more pointedly Juvenalian than Atkin's, but far richer in imagery and allusion; his caricatures bear witness to the techniques of Pope, who is cited at various points throughout, and also to those of Chaucer, especially as names and physical features are made congruent with the practice of corruption. In both poems, stewards and bailiffs come in for harsh treatment, as middlemen poised to exploit conflicts of interest, but in Clare there is no virtuous Jonah to check predatory behaviour. Clare also adds touches of Swift, in recurrent tropes of waste and filth—Atkin's ambitious apothecary has nothing on 'Dr. Urine', the innovative quack of *The Parish*, much as his vile gamekeeper is outdone by Clare's 'Bumtagg', 'reigning knight oer this dirty breed' of 'petty knaves', leader of a 'servile race / Who like their betters study to be base' (ll. 2081; 2064; 2066-67).[18] Clare's densely imaged yet



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pithy heroic couplets, building to strategic groupings of what he calls 'satires scourging songs' (l. 2075), embody literary ambition in a way that Atkin, who condemns ambition in the hudibrastic meter of *Jonah Tink* while cultivating it in his letters to Clare, could not manage.

This leads to a second and more encompassing difference between the two poems, which is that Clare's operates as a commentary on the purposes of poetic satire, and indeed of poetry itself, for his own times. *The Parish* is framed by complaints about the ineffectuality of weak writers whose 'praise turns satire and their satire praise' (l. 72), and similar points, sustained for as many as 20-40 lines, are inserted among the various rogues' galleries that make up the bulk of the poem. It is not too much to say that, as much as it is a topical satire, *The Parish* is also a satiric apology, a self-justification of the form that speaks to poetry's vocational and ethical complexities in the tradition of Chaucer, Dryden, Swift, and Pope. Generally, Clare abhors the trumpeting of 'patriotism' and 'reform' by those who benefit selectively from them, including tavern oracles, farmers with a vested interest in tariffs, and the like. He is specifically galled when such accommodationist pleadings, whether nostalgic or reformist, are called 'satire' with the ulterior motive of gaining patronage and public approval. Clare's defiance is directed both at the powers that be and at those who pretend to fight them while actually currying favour.[19] In particular, his portraits of a 'newspaper poet', a farmer trying to create, and make his name in, a public debate, and of 'Mr Puff', a know-it-all poetaster with an unpublished manuscript, make one wonder if Clare was drawing from his odd epistolary encounter with Atkin. While Atkin clearly saw himself as an unswerving truth-teller—that is, to borrow Clare's own self-description in *The Parish*, as something akin to a 'blood hound trac[ing] / Each smoothfaced tyrant to his hiding place' (ll. 97-8)—it is possible that he nevertheless became a model for Clare's damning portraits of hack-writers and failed satirists.

The situation is complicated by the concluding verse paragraph of *The Parish*. There Clare first dismisses Mr. Puff and his ilk—a race of 'small fry' who can all go to hell, or stay on their dunghills and rot—but then concludes the entire poem by quoting, as his culminating artistic defense against knavery, the very 'Motto' that Atkin had, in his letter of 25 February 1820, described as governing the satiric principles of *Jonah Tink*. 'The Cap amongst the Crowd is gone', Atkin had written then, 'The Man it fits, he puts it on'.



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Now here, at the end of *The Parish*, Clare deploys the same phrase against those who would be offended at his own satirical darts: 'So let them rail—the proverbs truth is known / Were the cap fits theyll wear it as their own' (ll. 2207-8). What to make of this? It seems most likely that Clare's adoption of this familiar tag is laden with a kind of private irony that doubles the satire back upon Atkin, who had declared his take-no-prisoners approach to *Jonah Tink* but had actually produced a poem that was far closer to fable than to satire. But we could say this with more confidence if we knew that Clare had read the full *Jonah Tink* in all its self-serving glory upon its 1823 publication, rather than simply the brief, uncontextualized excerpt Atkin had earlier provided him. A more cautious reading is that these lines show Clare claiming to outdo Atkin as a social commentator, but not denigrating Atkin's literary impulse. The timing of *The Parish*'s composition relative to the Atkin correspondence is also uncertain; though Clare was at work on his poem by 1820, and claimed to have a draft completed by 1821, it seems possible that 'Mr. Puff', at any rate, appearing as he does at the very end of the poem, was a late invention.

In any case, the possibility that Clare may at some point have chided Atkin, or sought to excuse himself from the correspondence, surfaces in Atkin's third and apparently final letter to Clare, from October 10, 1820. Having previously proposed, out of the blue, a long-term friendship and close-companioned literary fellowship, Atkin begins by saying that, 'In looking over my Memorandum Book, the other day, I discovered that I had received a letter from you, which as yet I had made no reply to'.[20] The change in tone is hard to figure—and Atkin's claim of forgetfulness is frankly unbelievable—but both probably relate to Atkin's perception of some continuing coolness on Clare's end of the exchange. Still, we can deduce from Atkin's remarks that Clare's prior letters had contained at least some gestures towards the literary give-and-take Atkin sought:

> You ask, whether Bloomfield be a Favorite Poet of mine? It is improbable that he should be any other than a favorite, though as I said before, I never bought any Poetical Works before yours. I have perused most of his Works, and admire them. I have also read Goldsmith, and Falconer's Shipwreck, in the latter there are a few lines which cannot be surpass'd by any Poet, at least not by any that I have read.—You will excuse me, but I am generally candid in giving my Opinion—When you write



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> to Bloomfield inform him, that Atkin would be favored of his correspondence, say also, that if I could have him and yourself together in my cottage, I should think it more highly honoured than if a King were in it.[21] I do not say that I could treat you with luxurious viands; but what I have, should be welcome to you as myself—Should you feel disposed to Pay a visit to my residence, I only say, you would not regret having done so. I think you would regret leaving, if not, you would be an exception; for all Persons who come here envy me both as it respect happiness, and pleasantry without the Cottage—So do not accuse me of Flattery, for I confess that I should be happy to see, or hear from you at any time.—Tell me how you spend your time now—let me direct your Attention to the Diaries, the Mathematical Companion &c. They will beguile away many a tedious Hour, and be a source of Profit, Pleasure, and Amusement. Should my Assistance be found necessary at first, command it, I shall be ever ready to assist, in what ever you may found to be deficient. [T]he above Books were the first stimulus to my Poetical Abilities, and tho' I have made no great Proficiency in Rhyming, yet the little I have Composed, when overlooked, yields great satisfaction.[22]

One notes immediately, as Clare surely did, the mingled tones of officious presumption and flattery ('When you write to Bloomfield inform him, that Atkin would be favored of his correspondence, say also, that if I could have him and yourself together in my cottage, I should think it more highly honoured than if a King were in it'). The clear implication is that Atkin was, on an ongoing basis, seeking other professional connections in the ranks of published poets. And whether or not he ever successfully contacted the author of *The Farmer's Boy*, we can say with certainty that Bloomfield is given a special place in *Jonah Tink*, through a scene in which Jonah's idle, estate-neglecting neighbour urges him to join in fox-hunting. Jonah will have none of it, smilingly noting that 'To spend my time in such pursuits, / Would place me far beneath the brutes' (ll. 821-22), and suggesting to the man that he give up the hunt for the edifying reading of Bloomfield's works (ll. 811-14).[23]

Perhaps Atkin was scouring the landscape for potential supporters. His volume's relatively few references to contemporary poets seem to indicate that he solicited support mainly from those likely to remember the beginner's plight. If



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Clare, for him, was part of this category, Clare is also a minor figure in the published volume—a lesser figure, it turns out, than one Benjamin Kemp. Writing of himself in the volume's Preface, Atkin notes:

> When he became Master of the Free School in his native village, his poetical talents became a source of pleasure; he paid a visit to (a then personally unknown Bard) Mr Benjamin Kemp, of Farnsfield, who not only advised and assisted, but cheerfully corrected his first Flights of Fancy. It was under his auspices that he obtained a Prize, and, whilst the rational faculties of that valued and respected friend remained unchanged, a yearly visit to him was a treat, which none but poets of congenial sentiments know the value of. The following lines acted as a stimulus to his perseverance, and like Clare, he pursued his favorite study, under every disadvantage.
>
> There is no record in the page of Fame,
> Of him who here has nothing but a name.

One can almost see played out here, as if unconsciously, Atkin's mixed record in cultivating a poetic mentor. Kemp of Farnsfield (though now an even more obscure figure than Atkin himself)[24] evidently came to fill the role imagined for Clare. The effusive reference to Kemp, followed by the impersonal reference to Clare, seems to chart the narrative implied by his letters: seeking connections where he could find them, Atkin received encouragement from Kemp and apparently decided, after the third letter, to end his pursuit of Clare. It is worth noting here that, for all the evidence of Atkin's zest for social networking, his career never took off. There is no second volume of poetry after *Jonah Tink*, and Atkin's name is largely absent from nineteenth-century texts, though he is described, twenty years later, as being one of the featured speakers at the 'Sherwood Gathering, in honour of Literature, Science, Art, and Moral Worth', on 5 July 1842.[25] He also may be the same John Atkin who in the 1840s published two textbooks: *A Practical and Self-Instructing English Grammar* (1845) and *A Practical and Comprehensive Arithmetic* (1846).[26]

In the end, we cannot know for certain what kind of mark John Atkin left on Clare's consciousness or work. If there is the chance that his letters made him a target of Clare's satire in *The Parish*, it is also possible to imagine that those letters, in their way,



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may have hit rather too close to home. That is, Clare may have seen in Atkin's correspondence—in its over-eagerness and self-interestedness—an exaggerated version of what he, at roughly the same time, was foisting upon potential patrons and supporters. As readers of his letters well know, Clare himself often engaged in highly self-conscious solicitations of help, and certainly he was doing so at the dawn of his public career in 1820.[27] However, the crucial difference—and here it is no sin to draw upon subsequent literary history—is that Clare seems to have known that he had something rich and original to offer the world, and he also sensed that, in order to succeed as a poet, he sometimes would have to fight against his own worst instincts. As he promises himself in *The Parish:* 'Ill strive to do what flattery bids me shun / Tell truth nor shrink for benefits to none' (ll. 81-2).

## NOTES

1. Bob Heyes, 'Selling John Clare: The Poet in the Marketplace', *JCSJ*, 24 (2005), 31.
2. Beyond Heyes's mention of the letters in 'Selling John Clare', the only critical commentary on these letters of which I am aware is Mark Storey's passing remark that Atkin's tone is 'grand', *Critical Heritage*, p. 4.
3. See Heyes, 'Selling John Clare', 33-6.
4. British Library, Egerton Manuscript (hereafter Eg.) 2245, fol. 23r. All transcriptions are my own; uncertain words are in angle brackets. Richard Newcomb was the editor of the *Stamford Mercury*, and was close to Edward Drury, proprietor of the bookshop.
5. Eg. 2245, fol. 23v-24r.
6. Quoted by Heyes, p. 36. The author of this letter, Heyes explains, was actually the naturalist Dawson Turner, who by this time had begun the literary and antiquarian collections for which he would become famous.
7. Atkin's reference here is possibly a misquotation of John Langhorne, *Studley Park* (1756), ll. 197-8: 'To blooming Studley's more delightful shades / Welcome, ye sacred, ye celestial maids!'
8. Eg. 2245, fol. 23r-23v.
9. Loughborough, Leicestershire, a town about 20-25 miles south of Newark.
10. Eg. 2245, fol. 43r-43v.
11. For Atkin's remark on his grandmother, see *Jonah Tink, A Poem* (Newark, S. & J. Ridge, 1823), p. iii. The *Mathematical Companion* was published annually between 1798 and 1827; see Thomas Wilkinson, 'Mathematical Periodicals', *Mechanics' Magazine*, 48 (1848):154-55. For Atkin's contributions to the *Companion*, see the *Waterloo Index of Victorian Periodicals*, available online.
12. *Jonah Tink*, p. 12. Fragments of some of Atkin's contributions to the annuals can be found through Google Books, e.g., this opening of a 'Charade' published in the *Gentleman's Mathematical Companion*: 'The poor old beggar, will my



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first produce; / My next, if mention'd, gives some females pain; / Should Parry find my whole, 'twill be of use'.

13. Atkin quotes his own line as 'Quite loth to leave, afraid to stay' but cites Clare's only as 'As — & — & — &' (Eg. 2245, fol. 43v.); we can assume the latter referred to Clare's line 'As, loath to leave, afraid to stay' ('Summer Evening', l. 155). Atkin again refers to this similarity in a footnote to *Jonah Tink's* published version: 'Clare in describing a Gossip, has the same idea, and nearly the same words; but as this part of the Poem was written before his made its appearance, the Author is not afraid of plagiarism being imputed to him' (p. 24).
14. Eg. 2245, fol. 43v-44v.
15. Atkin further directs attention to his character's name by opening the poem with a superfluous forty-line account of the process by which Jonah's parents come to select it.
16. 'Persons who have the served the office of High Sheriff, are *Esquires*; those who have not, yet possessed of considerable property, are *Squire-ets*; while those white-stocking Gentleman Farmers, are denominated *Squads*' (*Jonah Tink*, p. 24n). On Atkin's objections to monitorial schooling under the Madras system, see ll. 81-104 and associated note.
17. Atkin slightly revised the last two lines of this excerpt from 'The Gentry there would make a stir, / And say, Good morning to you Sir', as they appear in his letter, to 'The gentry there would forward press, / Good morning, *Sir*, was their address' in the published poem (ll. 881-2). The improvement is negligible, and speaks to Atkin's modest perception of poetic craft.
18. All citations of *The Parish* are from *John Clare, A Champion for the Poor*, ed. P. M. S. Dawson, Eric Robinson, and David Powell (Ashington and Manchester: Mid-NAG and Carcanet, 2000).
19. For a discussion of the complexities of Clare's attitudes toward landed wealth and aristocratic families, see Eric Robinson's introduction to *Clare, A Champion for the Poor*, pp. ix-lxiii.
20. Eg. 2245, fol. 233r.
21. Bloomfield had first written to Clare on 25 July, 1820 (*Letters*, p. 94n), so Clare's second letter to Atkin presumably had been written after that date.
22. Eg. 2245, fol. 233v-234r.
23. Atkin's poem does share some elements of the nostalgia Bloomfield expresses in *The Farmer's Boy* for a time in which gentry and peasantry lived comfortably alongside one another, in a spirit of mutual regard and understanding.
24. Kemp apparently never published a collection of poetry, but the two men shared a common interest in the puzzles from the annuals. One of Kemp's short rebuses, from Henry Seasons, *Speculum Anni: Or, Season on the Seasons* (London: Company of Stationers, 1792), p. 48, is as follows: 'Two thirds of a bird that's oft heard in the Spring, / And a term steady Time upon all things will bring, / Will give you the name of a man whom you'll find / If he sees his condition, had better be blind'. John Goodridge has suggested to me that the answer to this riddle is 'cuckold'.
25. Christopher Thomson, *The Autobiography of an Artisan* (London: J. Chapman, 1847), pp. 367-8. The other 'principal speakers were Mr. Thomas Lister, of Barnsley, the Bard of Rustic Wreath; Mr. S. T. Hall, the Bard of Sherwood; Dr. Holland, T. A. Ward, and W. Rhodes, Esqrs., of Sheffield; T. Wake, Esqr., of Worksop. . . Mr. Wm. Wood, of Eyam, Derbyshire, the Poet



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of the Peak; Mr. Charles Plumbe, the poet; [and] Dr. Mower, of Hodsock' (p. 368). 'This gathering', notes Thomson, 'was as mind- refreshing as the one of the previous year' (p. 368).

26. There is conflicting evidence on this. The author of these textbooks is described as the schoolmaster at Goole in East Yorkshire. But according to *Nottinghamshire. History, directory and gazetteer of the County* (Sheffield: Francis White & Co., 1864), p. 486, Atkin was schoolmaster in North Muskam for nearly fifty years, which would seem to rule him out.

27. See, for example, Clare's 1820 letters to Markham Sherwill.

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# For the House Sparrow, in Decline

*Paul Farley*

Your numbers fall and it's tempting to think
you're deserting our suburbs and estates
like your cousins at Pompeii; that when you return
to bathe in dust and build your nests again
in a roofless world where no one hears your *cheeps*,
only a starling's modem mimicry
will remind you of how you once supplied
the incidental music of our lives.



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# John Clare, William Wordsworth, and the (Un)Framing of Nature

*Scott Hess*

Since John Barrell's *Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place*, John Clare's poetry has often been read in relation to the conventions of Romantic-period landscape aesthetics and the discourse of the picturesque.[1] Scholars such as Timothy Brownlow in *John Clare and Picturesque Landscape* and Tim Chilcott in *'A Real World and Doubting Mind'* have explored Clare's aesthetics in detail, often showing how he broke from or directly challenged dominant landscape aesthetics of the time. Such scholars have demonstrated how Clare typically focuses on detail rather than broad or panoramic landscape compositions; prefers a ground-level point of view over the elevated prospect; and tends not to impose a regularizing syntax or regular aesthetic order onto what he describes. In these ways, Clare rejects the prevailing tendencies towards abstraction and generalization in the landscape aesthetics of his time, as well as its claims of 'disinterestedness' and separation between the observer and landscape observed. Instead of composing the landscape from a single stationed point above and outside it, Clare's narrators typically move through the environment they describe, creating a fully embodied sense of kinetic immersion in place.[2]

This essay will build on these insights, but with specific attention to the act of framing, which according to Malcolm Andrews in his recent survey of *Landscape and Western Art* defines and constitutes a landscape as such.[3] The picturesque movement in the late eighteenth century self-consciously organized the landscape through this technique of framing. Although the heyday of the picturesque movement was short, its perceptual structures of framing have been passed on, often unnoticed, and remain dominant in environmental aesthetics today, with important implications both for how we view landscape and for how we define and relate to 'nature' in general. William Wordsworth's 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' and 'Tintern Abbey' provide examples of how the perceptual structures of framing and picturesque vision persist, even in a poet who explicitly claimed



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to reject the influence of the picturesque. Such structures remain central to modern environmentalism, with its emphasis on visual experience, autonomous individual identity, and the conceptual separation of humans from 'nature'. Clare's poetry, in contrast, deliberately removes the frame from perception and in the process challenges this sense of visual detachment and separation between observer and landscape. In so doing, Clare offers an alternative environmental aesthetic more appropriate in many respects to our current environmental situation.

## I. Framing, the Picturesque, and 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'

In the tradition of landscape aesthetics, framing creates a landscape by establishing formal boundaries in an otherwise open-ended environment, within which the various elements of the landscape can be harmonized and composed. In so doing, however, the act of framing also produces a number of other effects which have been central, sometimes consciously but more often implicitly, both to the specific genre of landscape and to the overall idea of nature in the post-Renaissance Western tradition. Both perceptually and conceptually, the frame separates the viewer from what he or she sees, placing that observer outside the landscape observed.[4] Framing in the Western landscape tradition has also been closely associated with linear perspective: the representation of landscape from a single, stationed point of view, at which all sight lines converge.[5] Because the viewer's body in most cases remains unrepresented, he or she occupies the position of the disembodied subject, enjoying the characteristic 'view from nowhere' of the modern subject, defined as seemingly independent of place. Linear perspective landscape composition depends formally on the individual point of view, on which all sight lines converge, but it situates that point of view outside the landscape, on the other side of the frame. It thus constructs a seemingly autonomous subject, removed from the environment it observes and seemingly independent from specific social and environmental relationships. The aesthetics of framing in these ways subtly reinforces many of the epistemological and ontological categories of modernity: the autonomy of the observing self; the separation of the mind from the body and the perceiving subject from the object perceived; and a more general sense of separation between humanity and nature.



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In Clare's lifetime, these landscape aesthetics of framing were dominated by the discourse of the picturesque. Picturesque vision self-consciously depended on the act of framing: literally seeing the landscape *as* a picture, which required imposing a perceptual frame around it. The use of prominent foregrounds and sidescreens to frame the central landscape composition created the characteristic 'frame within the frame' of picturesque painting and sketches. Viewers then used these same devices to 'frame' actual landscapes, on picturesque tours or estates, extending the perceptual structures of framing from artistic representation into the direct experience of landscape.[6] The picturesque, like linear perspective in general, focuses a landscape from a fixed point of view, in the process emphasizing the individual subjectivity of the viewer and appropriating the landscape specifically to that individual viewing self. At the same time, picturesque vision depends on a sense of separation between viewer and landscape. With the Claude Glass, for instance—one of several related picturesque technologies of framing—the viewer turns his or her back on the actual landscape in order to frame it in a convex mirror at about the size of a postcard, literalizing the act of appropriation and dramatically enacting the separation between viewer and landscape.[7]

Although the actual embodiedness of the picturesque viewer was a general object of satire during the period—most famously in William Combe's *Tour of Doctor Syntax in Search of the Picturesque* (1812—), with its accompanying illustrations—ideally the viewer stood still and the body disappeared into the pure subjectivity of vision. The picturesque in this way not only isolated the viewer from the surrounding environment, but also isolated that viewer's vision (and subjectivity) from the rest of the body and the other senses. Taking a picturesque viewpoint also meant that the viewer did not have to perform physical labour in the landscape, associating that viewer with mind rather than body and defining him or her exclusively as subject, rather than object (of others' gazes). In these ways, the framing conventions of the picturesque defined the observer in terms of disembodied visual subjectivity, set apart both physically and conceptually from the landscape observed. Picturesque viewing was also defined as non-utilitarian, independent from specific economic or political goals (though it did assert the viewer's general cultural and political authority). Its exclusive focus on form and claims of 'disinterestedness' abstracted the viewer from all non-aesthetic and non-visual forms of relationships.



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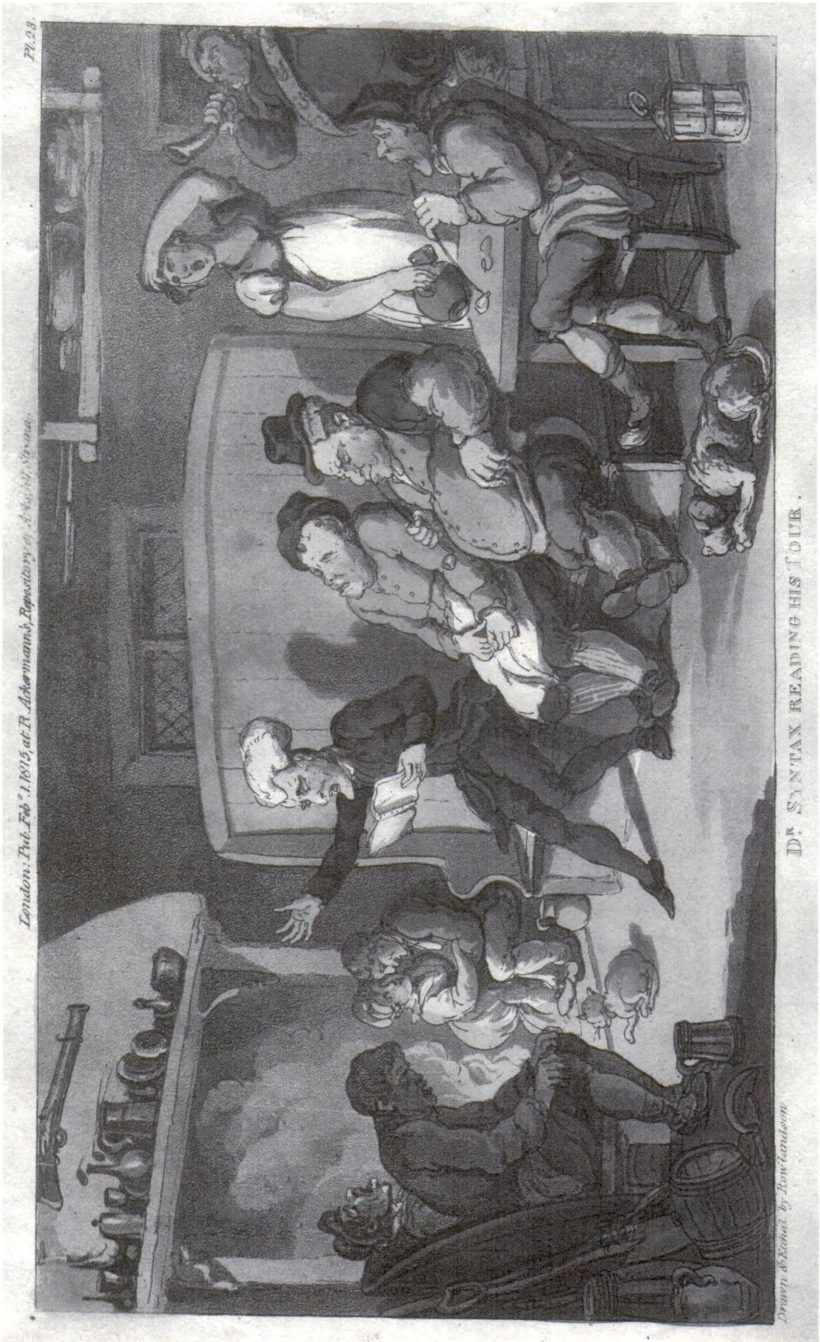




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The picturesque reached its heyday in the 1780s and 1790s, after which its aesthetic conventions began to seem increasingly artificial and gradually went out of fashion. The perceptual structures of the picturesque and its central technique of framing, however, have taken new forms and long outlived the self-identified picturesque movement. William Wordsworth's 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' provides an example from the Romantic period of how these picturesque modes of viewing often continue to structure perception and subjectivity, even in poems that do not visually frame the landscape or follow the specific formal conventions of the picturesque.[8] Such poems outwardly break from the picturesque, but they continue to propagate picturesque structures of experience.

'I wandered lonely as a cloud' begins with the narrator in a prospect position, in the position of picturesque traveller. He is a 'lonely' wandering cloud, floating high above the landscape he observes, detached and seemingly independent from both his social and natural environments. The main action of the poem begins as this 'wandering' narrator stops abruptly to contemplate the scene of the daffodils. This sudden stopping—the moment of the 'halted traveller' that Geoffrey Hartman identifies as a repeated structure in Wordsworth's poetry[9]— also enacts the experience of the picturesque 'station,' a convention of picturesque tours and guide books in which the traveller stops to compose the picturesque view from a specific location. The language of the poem heavily reinforces this sense of a picture suddenly coming into focus: the narrator sees the daffodils 'all at once' (3), then composes the landscape as he describes the relationship between its different elements, setting the daffodils 'along the Lake, beneath the trees' (6). The 1815 version of the poem extends this sense of composition into the second stanza, repeating the reference to the moment of composition as the poet sees ten thousand daffodils 'at a glance' (11). For over half the 1807 poem, and even longer in the 1815 version, the narrator remains stationed in place in a protracted moment of vision, emphasized by the repetition of the phrase 'I gaz'd—and gaz'd' (11). In picturesque fashion, the narrator seems to stand outside the landscape he contemplates, repeatedly invoking the sense of vision to the exclusion of the other senses and the rest of the body.

This isolation and disembodiment of vision intensifies in the final stanza, as the narrator's appreciation of and identification with the daffodils increases in direct proportion to his separation



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from them. The final stanza does briefly suggest the poet's body, as he 'lies' on his couch (13), but his body immediately dematerializes into another protracted experience of stationary vision—this time internal rather than external, as the daffodils 'flash upon [the] inward eye,' like an image projected onto an internal screen (15). Although the poet's heart subsequently 'dances with the daffodils' (18), it is the metaphorical heart and not the physical body that dances, and then only in the stillness of reverie and isolated vision. The narrator realizes the full value of his vision only after his body has been stilled into vision and he has been separated from the scene both in time and place. As the poem ends, he is in a sense doubly indoors—both in his closed room and in the closed spaces of his own memory and imagination. From that isolated subject position, he defines his identity entirely through stored visual material and internal imaginative processes, as if flipping through a mental photo album. Overall, the narrator internalizes the landscape as an imaginative resource in order to construct his own autonomous individual identity through a purely visual and non-reciprocal relationship—a form of picturesque appropriation emphasized by the poet's reference to the 'wealth' the 'show [has] brought' (12).

Throughout the poem, the narrator presents himself as completely alone, isolated from all forms of social as well as bodily relationship (including his sister Dorothy, who was also present and on whose journal entry of the experience William drew in composing the poem two years later).[10] The imaginative self-sufficiency and 'bliss of solitude' (16) that the poem celebrates depends on this elision of social relationship, removing the individual subject first into a position of spectatorial detachment, then imaginative isolation.

While 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' does not create an explicit visual frame around the scene, it does in these ways produce the perceptual effects of framing, in the exclusive emphasis on vision and separation between observer and landscape. The poem also creates another kind of formal frame by beginning and ending with the observer, so that the daffodils appear through a kind of sidescreen of self. The actual description of the daffodils in the 1807 version takes up only four lines—the final two lines of the first stanza and the first two of the following stanza—swathed in multiple, self-conscious layers of commentary on the self's perceptual and imaginative processes. This framing effect is further emphasized by the rather rigid punctuation at the end



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of each two-line unit throughout the poem. As the narrator contemplates the landscape through the poem's narrow aperture of visual description, he constructs his subjectivity apart from all other forms of bodily, environmental, or social relationship. The encounter that the poem describes in these ways more closely resembles viewing a photograph or a painting in a private room or a gallery, than a fully embodied and interactive outdoor experience. The narrator composes the landscape into aesthetic form from a single point, located outside that landscape, exactly in the manner of a picturesque viewer, and in the process constructs a purely visual and seemingly disembodied subjectivity. Even as he claims to connect to nature, he views that nature through a kind of invisible frame and turns it into a resource for the construction of his own seemingly autonomous self.

## II. John Clare and the Unframing of Nature

In contrast to 'I wandered lonely as a cloud,' John Clare's poetry deliberately contests picturesque conventions and takes nature out of its aesthetic frame. Clare typically presents himself in an embodied, participatory relationship with his environment as he moves through and interacts with his surroundings, rather than composing the landscape from a single, stationed point of view located outside of it. In the process, Clare constructs a very different aesthetic position—an aesthetics of engagement, rather than of spectatorship—and a very different model of the self, defined not through autonomous imaginative processes but through ongoing interactive relationships with both his social and natural environments.

Clare's 'Sonnet: "The passing traveller"' presents an experience of aesthetic appreciation that contrasts starkly with Wordsworth's 'I wandered lonely as a cloud.' Unusually for Clare, this sonnet offers the perspective of a traveller, but in a very different way from Wordsworth's poem. Clare's sonnet describes the traveller's experience primarily in terms of vision, but not from a single point. Instead, this traveller stops and wonders repeatedly. The verb 'stoops' (7) implicates his full body in the act of viewing, as he bends over to see the crows and peer down into the landscape below.[11] Even this visually-focused traveller, taking a picturesque prospect position (albeit of a decidedly unpicturesque sight), is represented in the sonnet as fully embodied within his environment: not only the subject but also the object of the poem's gaze.



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As in much of Clare's poetry, 'The passing traveller' does not offer just a single perspective on the landscape but shifts to include non-human as well as human perspectives. The horse who tosses his head and the squirrel who dances and runs through the treetops both seem to have their own agency and centre of perception. The poem then ends with the perspective of the boy, as its central point of view moves away from that of the traveller. In opposition to the picturesque mode, which tends to present the landscape from a single stationed viewpoint, this poem presents an environment experienced from many different perspectives at once, with multiple agencies not subordinated to any central point of view or hierarchy of perception. The reader or narrator cannot look at this landscape like a painting, from outside, because the poem offers no central organizing point or stable outside position from which to observe. Instead, the reader is drawn into an environment of multiple subjectivities, viewpoints, and agencies whose unity remains relational and open to subsequent shifts.

Tellingly, the poem concludes from the boy's perspective rather than the traveller's, dramatizing the physical engagement in Clare's model of perception. Like the traveller, the boy is suddenly rapt in aesthetic appreciation, but in a way that cannot be separated from his immediate embodiment or environmental context—for he is still in the tree, in the act of searching for magpies' nests, in a situation where he cannot afford to forget his body. His aesthetic experience comes unexpectedly in the midst of a kind of work, in the intense physical engagement of climbing: not in a moment of disinterested contemplation, but of full bodily immersion, literally in the middle of a tree. Significantly, it is the local inhabitant here, the boy, who experiences the fullest aesthetic significance of the environment, not the 'passing traveller,' the point of view typical of picturesque landscape appreciation.

Another of Clare's early poems, 'Summer Evening,' offers this sense of environmental immersion at greater length.[12] Like many of Clare's poems, 'Summer Evening' is implicitly organized by the perspective of the narrator, presenting a series of perceptions along a walk in from the fields to the village, ending inside a labourer's cottage. The poem's representation of environment, however, is not dominated or appropriated by that first-person point of view. The scarcity of the first-person pronoun in the poem, in contrast to its constant repetition in Wordsworth's 'I wandered lonely as a cloud,' underscores this difference. Clare's self here is implicit in



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but not separated from its perceptions and relationships, not even as a separate pronoun.

As in 'Sonnet: "The passing traveller"', 'Summer Evening' shifts among multiple points of view and centres of experience, including a wide range of animals who pursue their own purposes and agendas and even speak their own languages: 'Cooing sits the lonly dove / Calling home her abscent love / Kirchip Kirchip mong the wheat' (5-9). After giving an extensive catalogue of wild animals in these terms, interspersed with a few human labourers, the poem moves on to a series of human figures and domesticated animals, presented in similar ways as if from their own points of view.

This representation of environment through multiple points of view and subjectivities challenges a variety of picturesque separations: between subject and object, observer and landscape, aesthetic leisure and productive labour, humans and nature. Since it does not organize the landscape around a single, stationary point of observation, 'Summer Evening' offers no 'view from nowhere,' no place to stand outside of one's environment. Instead, as the narrator moves through the environment he describes, the poem presents a dynamic and open-ended field of relationships, subjectivities, and agencies among which the embodied narrator also finds his own place. Unlike the picturesque mode, which presents the landscape from a stationary and purely visual point of subjectivity, Clare's narrator presents an environment whose boundaries remain always fluid and provisional, shifting around him as he moves through it.

With this physical immersion in environment, Clare's poetry also includes a much wider range of sensual experience than 'I wandered lonely as a cloud.' Clare invokes multiple senses in the poem, often combined in single brief descriptions, as when the geese return to 'their warm straw litterd shed' (88)—a phrase that combines touch, smell, and vision into a single synaesthetic experience. The whole poem is suffused by this richly ambient, multi-sensory experience of place.

As the poem moves seamlessly from open fields to town, from wild animals to domestic animals and humans, it mingles work and leisure, contemplation and embodiedness, aesthetic and other forms of experience. The narrator's intimate knowledge both of the local labourers and animals—at one point calling even specific cows by name ('ball' and 'doll,' 54-55)—contrasts strongly with the generalizing tendencies of the picturesque,



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in which everything is seen from a perceptual distance and a cow is just a generic cow, a labourer just a generic labourer. The narrator's leisure in the poem, walking homewards, is intimately connected through this knowledge with his own and others' experience of work. His identity is deeply embedded in a social as well as a natural environment, with no clear boundaries between the two. Instead, the poem runs through a continuous spectrum of relationships, from the relatively wild to the relatively domesticated, creating a thoroughly hybridized version of the human place in nature.[13]

Even when the narrator comes indoors, in the poem's final lines, he does not experience any sense of separation from his environment. Unlike the enclosed indoors environment in 'I wandered lonely as a cloud,' with its sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency, even in his cottage Clare's narrator remains immersed in—almost cradled by—his environment. As the sound of the wind enters the cottage, it brings also the tactile feeling of the 'Elm trees mossy arms' (192). Instead of internalizing the landscape within himself, Clare's narrator continues to be held by his environment, even indoors, rocked to sleep as if in the elm's and the wind's arms. This relational version of the self cannot by definition be separated from the web of relationships and perceptions that constitute it, at once both social and natural. There is a strong sense of subjectivity here, but no place to stand outside of nature and no definite boundary between self and world. By unframing perception, the poem in effect also unframes the self, defined now through an open-ended and ongoing series of interactions and relationships.

Clare challenges the picturesque tendency to separate viewer from landscape explicitly in a manuscript, 'Essay on Landscape.' In this essay, Clare praises the painter and watercolourist Peter DeWint for his fidelity to natural detail and his ability to capture the feeling of being in place as more than just a visual experience. He writes that in DeWint's paintings, 'tis summer the very air breathes hot in ones face,' evoking the sensual immediacy of immersion in place rather than the visual distance of the picturesque spectator.[14] In praising DeWint, Clare also criticizes the artificial framing techniques of the dominant landscape tradition as imposing false boundaries between observer and environment. In DeWint's paintings, he writes,



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> the eye is led over the Landscape as far as a sunbeam can reach & the sky & earth blends into a humanity of greetings & beautiful harmony & symetry of pleasant imaginings—There is no harsh stoppage no bounds to space or any outline further then there is in nature—if we could possibly walk into the picture we fancy we might pursue the landscape beyond those mysterys (not bounds) assigned it so as we can in the fields—so natural & harmonious are his perceptions & tints & lights & shadows (211).

Not content with the role of detached observer, Clare praises an art that encourages the viewer to participate in an almost bodily, kinetic way in the represented environment, as if he could walk right into the painting. The landscape in this art is not organized by an individual gaze from outside, but opens to include the observer, if only imaginatively, as a fully embodied being among other beings. Clare's poetry imaginatively immerses his reader in its environments in the same way.

Clare's model of environment in this sense resembles that advocated by the current aesthetic philosopher, Arnold Berleant, who opposes the spectatorial detachment of the landscape tradition with what he calls an 'aesthetics of engagement.'[15] In this more participatory aesthetics, the viewer is not separated from the environment he or she contemplates. Correspondingly, the subject is not separated from the object of appreciation or the mind from the body. In contrast to Western aesthetics' traditional emphasis on detachment and 'disinterestedness,' Clare and Berleant's aesthetics of engagement depends on embodied immersion within the environment one appreciates.

Berleant's contrast between these two aesthetic approaches sums up the difference I have been trying to draw between 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' and Clare's poetry. A brief comparison of Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' with another Clare sonnet, 'Beans in Blossom,' further illustrates this difference. 'Tintern Abbey' begins and ends in a prospect position, overlooking a landscape from which the narrator remains physically separate: the visual equivalent of a picturesque station. Like 'I wandered lonely as a cloud,' it offers a relatively brief passage of description, framed at great length by the self and its imaginative activities. Both of these poems celebrate the narrator's ability to internalize the landscape as image, in order to sustain a sense of autonomy, meaning, and value in times of vacancy—as 'Tintern Abbey' puts



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it, in the 'lonely rooms, and mid the din / Of towns and cities'.[16] 'Tintern Abbey' goes even further than 'I wandered lonely as a cloud,' however, in thematizing the shift from a physical to a contemplative and spectatorial—and thus disembodied—relationship with place. In contrast with the narrator's younger and more embodied relation to nature, 'the coarser pleasures of my boyish days, / And their glad animal movements' (74-75), Wordsworth in 'Tintern Abbey' celebrates a more 'mature' relationship in which

> the breath of this corporeal frame,
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things. (44-50)

The purification of vision from the body here, as even the flow of blood seems suspended, leads to a moment of pure subjectivity unencumbered by bodily relationships to place. Through the same process, the poet defines himself as free also from social relationships (except for his relationship to his sister, Dorothy, who appears at the end of the poem as a projection of the poet's own past self, apart from all other social contexts). The narrator bases his identity in the poem on a traveller's exclusively visual relationship to place, without any immediate interaction with the local inhabitants and without even physically having to enter the environment he claims to make central to his identity. Instead, the poet's relationship with the landscape begins with separation and leads in the direction of generalization, as the poem transforms the particularities of the scene into the twinned and mutually supporting abstractions of 'nature' and 'self.'

Clare's 'Beans in Blossom,' in contrast, begins with the experience of the wind against the narrator's face, breaking down any sense of separation between narrator and environment. As he walks, the narrator hears the 'wild music' of the blackbird and experiences the 'luscious [...] scent of blossomed beans / That oer the path in rich disorder leans / Mid which the bees in busy songs & toils / Load home luxuriantly their yellow spoils' (7-10).[17] Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' focuses on vision, as the medium of memory and imagination, concentrating value on a purely visual moment when all other bodily activity is 'laid asleep' and the



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observer seems to 'see into the life of things' (46, 50). For Clare, in contrast, the life of things reveals itself not to the isolated and detached eye, observing from afar, but only to the fully embodied senses of the person who moves and lives among them—including the more proximal senses of touch, smell, and taste, which blur the boundary between subject and object and situate the perceiver fully within an ambient environment. Clare does not seek the 'life of things' in progressive abstraction and generalization, but in the sensual particulars of the 'luscious' beans, their 'rich disorder' filled with the 'songs & toils' of bees. This tangle of embodied beings mingles taste and smell and sound and sight and many overlapping agencies. The beans lean over the path and the poet, together with the bees, moves through and among them.

## III. Taking Nature out of the Frame

Not all of Wordsworth's environmentally-focused poetry concentrates as exclusively on vision or reproduces the framing effects of the picturesque as thoroughly as 'Tintern Abbey' and 'I wandered lonely as a cloud.'[18] These poems, however, are an example of the extension of picturesque visual structures even into poems that at first glance seem to break from the picturesque, in their emphasis on direct spiritual and emotional connection with nature.[19] In effect, such poems recreate the effects of picturesque framing without imposing an actual physical frame. The observing self celebrates 'nature,' but only from a perceptual distance, through a kind of invisible frame that removes the self from the landscape it claims to appreciate. The very act of nature appreciation in this picturesque mode thus ironically imposes a sense of separation between self and nature. In poems and artworks of this kind, this visual detachment of the observer from the landscape also supports other forms of separation whose legacy continues for modern environmentalism: including the emphasis on individual identity in nature, apart from social relationships; the division of aesthetic and spiritual activity from work, society, economic life, and mundane everyday experience; and the broader conceptual separation of humans from nature. This understanding has defined 'nature' as a special imaginative and spiritual sphere where we can find our 'true selves', apart from our daily lives and relationships.

Attitudes such as these ironically disembody and disconnect the self from its environment, through the very process of



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claiming to connect with nature. In an even more tragic irony, this self, removed from immediate social and environmental relationships, has become the type of the modern consumer, so that our forms of nature appreciation often covertly support the very consumerism that they claim to oppose—one reason that 'green marketing' and advertising's 'greenwashing' of commercial products have been so successful.[20] Nature appreciation in the picturesque mode tends to take the form of either actual or imaginative tourism. We seek 'nature' in the pristine and the exotic—places where we remain by definition outsiders (such as wilderness or undeveloped countries), just as we remain by definition outside the frame of the landscape. We look for 'nature' elsewhere, rather than committing ourselves to reinhabiting our everyday relationships and environments.[21]

By framing nature as separate from society, culture, and economics, the picturesque mode also unfortunately tends to separate 'social' and 'environmental' problems, rather than encouraging us to address those issues together. This mode of nature appreciation has also supported another form of 'framing,' in the American institution of the National Park (now exported around the world) with its tendency to separate 'untouched' and aesthetically beautiful natural areas, which are heavily regulated or set aside for preservation, from more developed or less aesthetically appealing areas which make up the bulk of the landscape and remain open to further exploitation. This idea of nature, many commentators have pointed out, creates a kind of schizophrenia typical of American environmental attitudes especially—between the pristine 'nature' we protect, for aesthetic as well as imaginative reasons, and the unappealing everyday environments that we continue to degrade.[22] Broadly put, when we frame nature, our everyday lives and activities remain inevitably, by definition, outside of the frame, in ways that have had deeply problematic environmental consequences.

In contrast, by breaking the frame of the picturesque, Clare's poetry breaks the frames around both 'nature' and 'self,' suggesting a new environmental ethos more appropriate to our twenty-first century situation. Clare relates to his environment through a full spectrum of bodily activity, not just vision, in ways that break down the boundaries imposed by the picturesque between work and aesthetic appreciation, practical and imaginative activity, and human and non-human agency. Nature, for Clare, is not elsewhere, but here, everywhere around us. He calls us to redirect



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our attention away from nature as visual landscape to nature as everyday lived environment, and to include our most ordinary actions and relationships. Clare's poetry removes the illusion of the 'view from nowhere': the idea that we can stand apart from the world as an abstract and autonomous subject, looking on from outside. Instead, it supports a model of the embodied subject, itself part of the environment it appreciates. Clare's self is relational, not autonomous. It is constituted, not through stored visual images and internalized imaginative processes, but through immediate and ongoing relationships, both social and environmental. Clare's tendency to locate himself firmly in his home place, rather than taking a mobile traveller's perspective on the landscape, also encourages readers to root themselves and their environmental appreciation in their own home places. By unframing nature, Clare encourages us to understand ourselves not as traveling spectators, in the picturesque mode, but as inhabitants; and as we reinhabit place, we are also forced to reinhabit our selves in the full range of our social, economic, and environmental relationships.

By removing the invisible frame of the picturesque tradition, Clare removes the illusion that there is or can be a single privileged point of view from which an entire landscape (or all of 'nature,' that ultimate abstraction) can be organized. Clare's nature is vulnerable, dependent, relational: something we need to experience and shape together through collective activity, rather than seek as a refuge for our isolated selves. By removing the frame, Clare's aesthetic of participation and immersion redefines both nature and self as open-ended spectrums of engagements whose unities remain multiple, relational, and always in flux. Clare's poetry encourages us to reintegrate social and environmental thinking by making a place for human livelihood within nature, in ways that can better address the full complexity of today's environmental issues. In short, Clare's version of nature is much more appropriate to our twenty-first century ecological situation, in which it no longer makes much sense to claim that a 'Nature' heated by global warming and infused with synthetic chemicals 'never did betray / The heart that loved her' ('Tintern Abbey,' 123-24).

Clare's sense of self as immersed in environment and the specificity of place, of course, did make him vulnerable to the degradation of that place. But this ethos of vulnerability seems appropriate, in a different way, to our environmental situation today, in which we are all ecologically vulnerable, albeit to different extents and in different ways, depending on our own



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various social positions. Now as then, the poor bear the heaviest burden of environmental degradation.

The point of this essay is not to place blame or responsibility on Wordsworth for our current environmental situation, which he would deplore as much as anybody. He faced a different cultural and ecological situation than we do today, and we cannot expect him to anticipate an age of ecology, when human power to alter nature on a global scale has become massive and increasingly dangerous. The point, instead, is to become more self-conscious about how we celebrate Wordsworth and others in his tradition as ecological poets, often in ways that involve us, without our awareness, in the ongoing legacy of the picturesque. Celebrating nature without this critical self-awareness can actually exacerbate, rather than help solve, environmental problems, because of the ways our ideas of nature structure our social and economic lives and our approach to environmental issues.

To pretend to define our subject positions at an aesthetic distance from nature today has become an increasingly destructive and irresponsible luxury. We cannot address the environmental challenges of our time by saving a few privileged places only or by cherishing primarily a few framed and privileged moments of experience. Instead, we must realize that we are ecological citizens, immersed in a web of relationships and processes we cannot pretend to order, control, or even fully understand from the outside: in today's environmental crises, there is nowhere to stand outside the frame.

## NOTES

1. John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972).
2. Timothy Brownlow, *John Clare and Picturesque Landscape* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Tim Chilcott, *'A Real World and Doubting Mind': a Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1985).
3. Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 5.
4. For other sources on framing, in relation to linear perspective in the arts, see Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1985), and Gina Crandell, *Nature Pictorialized: 'The View' in Landscape History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
5. For a comparison between Western linear perspective and other forms of landscape representation (as in Japan and China), as well as a broad survey of



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different kinds of representation, see Edward S. Casey, *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

6. For a readable and comprehensive introduction to the picturesque, see Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989). See also Andrews' introduction to *The Picturesque: Literary Sources and Documents*, ed. by Andrews, three volumes (Robertsbridge: Helm Information, 1994), I, pp. 3-37.
7. For a general description of the Claude glass, see Andrews, *Search for the Picturesque*, pp. 67-73. Picturesque viewers and artists also used other technologies, such as the drawing machine and the camera obscura, to enable this framing process, and viewing windows framing the landscape were popular. The photographic camera was a direct extension of these picturesque viewing modes and technologies—see Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning With Desire: the Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).
8. Poem quoted from *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-7*, ed. by Jared Curtis (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983). Unless otherwise indicated, I will quote from and interpret the three-stanza, 1807 version.
9. Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, repr. 1964); section I is entitled 'The Halted Traveller,' see esp. pp. 12-18.
10. For Dorothy's journal version, see *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by Helen Darbishire (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 109. On William's use and alteration of Dorothy's journal in producing his poem, see Elizabeth A. Fay, *Becoming Wordsworthian: a Performative Aesthetics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), pp. 149-51.
11. *Northborough Sonnets*, p. 98.
12. *Early Poems*, I, pp. 5-12.
13. For a definition of a 'hybridized nature,' see Adrian Franklin, *Nature and Social Theory* (London: Sage, 2002), pp. 132-79.
14. *Prose*, p. 212.
15. Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), p. 12.
16. Quoted from *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. by James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 117, lines 26-27. Subsequent quotation are cited by line number from this edition.
17. *Midsummer Cushion*, p. 401.
18. Many of Wordsworth's most celebrated poems, however, do follow this mode. 'Michael' and 'The Ruined Cottage' both place individuals in specific stationed positions, from which they 'read' the significance of ruins in a picturesque manner. The 'Intimations Ode' ends by reintegrating the poet 'in thought' into the pastoral community from which he has become alienated in body, as he transforms into an 'eye / That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality'—the detached, stationed spectator of picturesque vision (174, 201). 'A Solitary Reaper' focuses on sound rather than sight, but in other ways presents a paradigmatic version of the picturesque mode, appropriating the reaper's visual image as well as her song for the decontextualized individual observer. The two great epiphanic visions of the *Prelude*, crossing Simplon Pass and ascending Mount Snowdon, follow the conventions of the sublime rather than the picturesque, but both moments, like so many of the other



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'spots of time,' emerge when the poet suddenly halts for stationed observation, ultimately allowing him to affirm the autonomy of his own imagination and identity through that visual stationing. I am currently working on a book project, 'William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship', which will explore this theme in Wordsworth's writing at much greater length.

19. For one version of this standard narrative of Wordsworth's break with the picturesque and more direct appeal to nature, see Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 119-52.
20. For a provocative exploration of how nature appreciation and consumerism get entangled, see Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), esp. chapter 4, 'Looking for Nature at the Mall,' pp. 167-206.
21. On the omnipresence of these visual forms of nature, see for instance Alexander Wilson, *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), see esp. pp. 117-55; and Fred Inglis, 'Landscape as Popular Culture,' in *Reading Landscape: country-city-capital*, ed. by Simon Pugh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 19-40.
22. I could cite a wide array of sources on these various kinds of 'framing,' but will suggest three that I find particularly wide-ranging, concise, and provocative: Wilson, cited above; William Cronon, 'The Trouble With Wilderness,' in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. by Cronon (New York: Norton, 1996), pp. 69-90; and J. Baird Callicot, 'The Land Aesthetic,' in *Ecological Prospects: Scientific, Religious, and Aesthetic Perspectives*, ed. by Christopher Key Chapple (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 169-83. Though modeled after the American National Park system, the British National Parks integrate nature preservation with human inhabitation and economic activity much more fully, in part because there were no unsettled areas left when the British Park system was instituted in the mid-twentieth century: see Jay Appleton, 'A Sort of National Property: The Growth of the National Parks Movement in Britain,' in *The Lake District: a Sort of National Property* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1986), pp. 113-22.



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# On the Portrait of John Clare by Henry Behnes

*Tom Bates*

During a recent retreat to the South Island, New Zealand, I was given unexpected cause to remember that cluster of painters and sculptors who became known to John Clare on his visits to London, which ended in 1828. On a cold, clear evening in Christchurch, loitering with no intent across Cathedral Square, I was drawn away from the cathedral front by an over-sized statue silhouetted against the last of daylight. The profiles of the piece hinted at complexities within a powerful composition, the work of someone who had mastered his craft. The sculptor transpired to be an Englishman, Thomas Woolner,[1] maker of the statue, which was unveiled in 1865 in commemoration of the founder of Canterbury, the Irishman John Robert Godley. Woolner was the only sculptor of the original group of six artists who met at the Royal Academy and were to found the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848. As a boy of twelve in 1838, Woolner commenced a practical pupil apprenticeship in the London studio of William Behnes a year after the death in Rome of Behnes' brother Henry, sculptor of the portrait of Clare which appears on the cover of this journal.

Clare's visits to London coincided with an upsurge in the influence of the Royal Academy, founded in 1768 under the auspices of George III to centralise teaching and study in the fine arts, supplanting institutions in central London that were akin to the school founded earlier by William Hogarth in St Martin's Lane. The Academy's close links to crown, state and aristocratic patronage effectively underwrote the phenomenon of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century portraiture in sculpture, and the proliferation of public statuary in the heart of Georgian and Victorian London, to which studios known to John Clare contributed, one of which was the studio of William Behnes for whom Henry had worked for some years. In tracking the career of Henry Behnes it is necessary to relate details in the career of William that were to determine the course of Henry's life up to and



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including his self-exile to Italy, and to make occasional reference to the rival London studio of Sir Francis Chantrey. Such deviations may not immediately appear to have a bearing on Clare's work, and yet do so, not least because of the shift towards a new realism, which was prevalent in both studios and characterised their output before and during the decade of Clare's intermittent sojourns in London, when the poet's friendships with the 'Nithsdale Mason' Allan Cunningham,[2] the senior of Chantrey's assistants, and with Henry Behnes, began and flourished. These friendships became crucial to Clare, heightened by sympathetic interests and similar creative aims, which resulted years later in Behnes being asked to make the Northampton portrait.

The bust was commissioned and the fee (if there was one) and the plaster cast were paid for by Clare's publisher John Taylor.[3] The piece was modelled and moulded in February and March 1828, and cast, dried and coloured later that year. The finished cast was owned by Taylor and remained in his possession until his death in July 1864. On 17 March 1865 it was auctioned at Christie's, when it became the possession of Clare's first biographer Frederick Martin, and was subsequently purchased by Northampton Public Libraries Committee in 1913. The commission probably came about as a private agreement between friends, as an act of kindness to Clare by those who valued him and who, acquainted with his troubles, were persuaded that a likeness, as a gift to posterity (similar in intention to that made earlier by William Behnes of Lord Radstock,[4] Clare's patron) would be a gesture not at all out of place: a generous act of solidarity, for which all readers of Clare should be grateful.

The portrait also has the additional fascination of being a tribute from one artist to another, by a sculptor whose thoughtful concern for Clare is a matter of record.[5] Unlike the sentimental and prettified image of Clare by William Hilton, now in the National Portrait Gallery, Behnes' portrait seems a more robust and credible likeness of the poet and is much to be preferred. Veering almost clear of idealism,[6] the head is more honestly realised, hinting at stoutness and, despite Romanising, reflects something of the shift away from classicism in Victorian painting and sculpture, towards the reflection of high Victorian art and fidelity to nature espoused in the declared aims and principles of Woolner and his brethren in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.



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Henry Behnes, the second of three brothers, was born in London in 1802. William, senior by seven years, was to become one of the most sought-after portraitists in sculpture during the reign of George IV. Their father was a Hanoverian who, after service as a surgeon in the English Navy married an English wife to settle in London, developing a business as a maker of pianofortes. According to contemporary sources,[7] both brothers acquired skills in woodcraft and the precise techniques required in constructing pianofortes: an apprenticeship in the need for very high standards of technical proficiency that would be characteristic of their later work practices in the fine arts.

After a financially ruinous venture in Dublin, the Behnes family re-settled at 23 Charles Street, London, close to Middlesex Hospital. Peter Chenu, RA, a well-established artist, had a professional fine art studio at that address and appears to have been their landlord after giving refuge to the Behnes family. He later undertook to be teacher and instructor to William and Henry Behnes in preparation for their entrance to the Royal Academy Schools.[8] In addition to those skills acquired during the years of working for and assisting their father, a wide range of fine arts practices would be added, centring on drawing, modelling, casting and carving, all of which were essential to a career as a practising sculptor in Georgian and Victorian England.[9] When the time came, the brothers Behnes were unusually well trained and fitted for studentship at the Royal Academy. Apprentice life in the studio of Peter Chenu would also have given an ambitious young man detailed insight into how such a studio was appointed and run as a commercial enterprise, an experience William was to put to good use a few years hence when he opened his own studio in Soho.[10]

In 1813, aged eighteen, William Behnes entered the Royal Academy Schools and 'thus constituted' became 'an ardent student'.[11] In 1814 he received a silver medal for merit from the Society of Arts, and in 1816, 1817 and 1819 silver medals from the Royal Academy. In 1819 he received the highest recognition from the Society of Arts, the gold medal, for the design and construction of a pointing machine, an aid to exactness and verisimilitude when enlarging plaster maquettes and pattern models into marble.[12] Success seemed to engender success; his income allowed a family move to 31 Newman Street, London, off Goodge Street, north Soho, near to the heart of artistic London. In 1818 Clare's patron Lord Radstock sat for William Behnes, for a commissioned portrait.[13]



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Princess Victoria by William Behnes, 1829
The Royal Collection © 2008, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II



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Between 1820 and 1830 commissions came in abundance, and Behnes opened a larger studio at 91 Dean Street, Soho, in the heart of the artists' quarter. It was an expensive move, which was to be the first of many financial blunders. Yet while still a student in 1818 and immediately afterwards, the achievements of William Behnes were notable, providing work enough to open a professional studio, retain the services of his brother Henry, and provide for the rest of the family. The importance of Behnes' studio to London artistic culture may be gauged by the recorded scale and quality of Behnes' commissioned pieces.[14] During the years 1821 to 1826 no less than ten pieces were purchased for the Royal Collection, including a marble bust of Princess Victoria, commissioned by George IV, for which Behnes asked Clare for a sonnet to highlight an engraving of the portrait.[15] Upon the accession of Princess Victoria to the throne in 1837, Behnes received an honorary appointment as Sculptor in Ordinary to the young queen, and appeared enviably placed to consolidate a glittering career as master of one of the most prestigious studios in the capital. Yet the appointment did not yield a single royal commission. Sir Francis Chantrey's appointment as sculptor to the late king had lapsed, yet it was to him that the first royal commission for a likeness of Queen Victoria was given. This denial of royal patronage may have had cause in Behnes' growing notoriety, as his 'moral reputation began to suffer from irregularities which mark a man even among the indifferently honest'.[16] His decline seems as inexorable as his rise to fame. As his fame had grown, his conduct and reputation deteriorated. In 1832 the purchase of another studio at Osnaborg Street, close to Regent's Park, caused his financial problems to deepen. Anticipating bankruptcy and acting on the advice of Samuel Carter Hall, with the discrete disclaimer 'that the works of two brothers in the same profession should not be confounded', Henry Behnes elected to distance himself from his brother's reputation by adopting the surname Burlowe.[17]

Henry Weekes, then lecturer in sculpture at the Royal Academy Schools, wrote a retrospective account outlining causes for William Behnes' problems: 'Behnes had to support a father, himself lost', and, tellingly, he was said to have 'begun from less than nothing, for he had to retrace the backward path his parents had made before him'.[18] The youngest brother, Charles, was an invalid until his death in 1847, dependent all his life upon his eldest brother. In the same account Weekes recorded that



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William Behnes' 'ill-regulated life was beginning to tell upon him ... [with] curses in the shape of increasing debts, growing vices', and that Behnes 'was tossing about in a sea of troubles and beating the waves with his hands like a drowning man', having long ago delivered himself into the grasp of moneylenders, until in 1861 he was declared a bankrupt, the contents of his studios confiscated, auctioned and dispersed.

Yet since 1818 his success and fame had been undeniable. In a productive career Behnes exhibited 216 works at the Royal Academy and could list 97 portraits, 17 major statues and 40 monuments to his name, achievements which make accounts of the end of his career and life such sad reading. Unlike Chantrey, he left no estate by which his accomplishments could be measured. His end was wretched: Samuel Carter Hall recalled how early in January 1864 Behnes had been 'found one night literally in the gutter with threepence in his pocket somewhere close to Middlesex Hospital'.[19] William Behnes died on 7 January and was buried in Kensal Green cemetery. Among the mourners were the artists George Cruickshank and Thomas Woolner, the latter paying last respects to his former master. Whatever the faults of his temperament, Behnes was thought by his contemporaries to have been among the foremost sculptors of his time.[20] Had he possessed a little of Chantrey's acumen, and benefited from the acuity and counsel of Allan Cunningham, the Vasari of the age, his reputation might have deserved better than the judgement of the obituarist of the *Art Journal* of 1864, who considered his impecunity 'could have been overcome with common prudence'.

The purpose of this summary of the career of William Behnes is to contrast the less distinguished achievements of Henry Behnes. By comparison his career appears to have been inauspicious and to have stalled for at least a decade. As a sculptor remembered 'for that genius that was undoubtedly his',[21] hyperbole aside, his lack of achievement seems baffling. Henry Behnes began his studentship well enough. In 1821 he entered the Royal Academy and in 1823 was awarded a silver medal; after that began years of apparent inaction.

He did not recommence exhibiting until a burst of activity ten years after his entry into the academy, under his newly adopted surname of Burlowe. Between 1831 and 1833 he exhibited twelve works in the summer exhibitions of the Royal Academy and two at



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the Society of British Artists in the Suffolk Street Galleries, where Edward Rippingille, his friend and Clare's, was a regular exhibitor. The *Dictionary of British Sculptors* lists only fifteen works under his name, without registering the existence of Clare's portrait. These records are testimony to a slight output compared to that of his elder brother. The explanation has its origin in Henry Burlowe's nature, which would, I think, given the kindliness and gentle disposition of his character, be unfitted for the combative world of competition and aggressive networking by which commissions were gained. Burlowe's intimate friends recalled a man of 'high moral worth and principle', standards which could explain his apparent eclipse by the fame of his brother. Modesty and consideration for family need and welfare may have decided the role he chose to play in the Behnes studio, probably as senior assistant, overseer and secretary, a role akin to that played by his friend Allan Cunningham, the poet, historian of contemporary culture and sculptor, on behalf of Sir Francis Chantrey: a role which would necessarily have required Henry to have moderated whatever ambitions he may have had, in order to work efficiently for his brother.

The responsibilities of senior assistant and secretary would have been considerable and time-consuming, and were critical to the professional management and output of a fine art studio in Georgian and Victorian London. The role was complex and demanding. Duties included supervision of supply of essential materials, delegation of the preparation of a variety of materials and care and maintenance of tools and equipment. Regular pedagogical duties in training boy pupils and teenaged technical assistants demanded a working knowledge of drawing and all aspects of modelling, casting and finishing, and of a wide range of alternative fine art techniques, linked to the properties and qualities of materials other than those traditionally associated with sculpture. To teach and instruct would have required encyclopaedic knowledge of the theory and practice of technique alone. Senior practitioners would have had to acquire learning in contemporary versions of the history and art of the classical world, if the studio was to realise and sustain principles of the antique in contemporary images by contemporary means, work which was still in demand despite the shift towards realism.

The labour and skill of replicating portraits in plaster as life sized or over-life sized marbles, ready for exhibition or despatch, was work essential to the good name of the studio, and would have required oversight and technical participation when



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necessary—work which day-to-day required particular attention, and could not be skimped or treated with less than the utmost seriousness. Contemporary studios, including those of Chantrey and Behnes, had to be at the forefront of new technologies aiding accurate representation. Camera lucida and pointing machines in both studios indicate work carried out through the deployment of techniques dedicated to verisimilitude.

The realism of the new movement was subsequently appropriated by crown and state for purposes of propaganda, national and international prestige, with politically motivated imagery to perpetuate the image of an empire 'on which the sun never set', in imitation of ancient Rome. Realism became the international style, which during the Napoleonic era, through the influence of French artists and the Paris salon, was also spread across Europe, the French colonies and even America. In the wake of British imperial expansion it would wash into America, Africa, Canada, India, Malaysia, Hong Kong and China, the western European naturalistic style elbowing aside traditional imagery, to promote the cause and authority of the ruler, and which still functions to glorify present-day regimes, totalitarian and otherwise.

Such an abbreviated account cannot fully represent the degree of professionalism expected of Henry Behnes Burlowe or Allan Cunningham, leaving aside the siting of commissions, private work, personal projects and those apparently trivial customs of courtesy due to all clients and commissioning agents, and contact and correspondence with importers, exporters, suppliers and tradespersons vital to the efficiency of the studio. The studios of Behnes and Chantrey, like others across nineteenth-century Europe, were fashionable centres of commercial manufacture, businesses distant from notions of solitary, Romantic genius. Pursuit of success demanded serious, full-time commitment from practitioners, which may go some way to explaining the lack of apparent sculpting activity of Henry Behnes Burlowe for the decade after 1821. Not until 1834 did he finally quit the London studio and England for Rome and a new life among the English colony reconstituted after the Napoleonic Wars ended in 1815, and whose brightest ex-pat star was the sculptor 'Grecian' John Gibson.[22] Burlowe did well for a time, in demand as a portraitist until the cholera epidemic of 1837 claimed this 'honest, kind-hearted, and genuine good man' in circumstances related in a powerful obituary by Edward Rippingille, who was angered by the fate of his friend.[23]



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How much of the detailed operation of both studios Clare became familiar with must be conjecture, yet given Clare's powers of meticulous observation and the fact that he once became 'almost mad with anxiety to be a sign painter and stone cutter'[24] he would have been watchful of the processes and practices within both studios, his attentiveness heightened by the professional expertise and informed conversation of Behnes Burlowe or Allan Cunningham. Both were articulate men with vast experience of making sculpture, who would have responded to any questions, or sense of excitement about the intricacies of the craft and art. Clare's passion for faithful representation in painting and illustration is reflected by his developing taste, from Bewick to his contemporaries William Hilton, Thomas Lawrence, Edward Rippingille and Peter DeWint. The 'new' concentration upon faithful likeness in sculpture in the studios of Behnes and Chantrey would have had particular relevance for Clare, perhaps intensified by the conversation of such literate friends. All of Clare's artist friends were unusually literate men, who shared with Clare a passion for literacy and learning, which at this time and for some time after was crucial to Clare's sense of identity and emergence as a major poet. Clare's attachment to Allan Cunningham was founded partly upon a shared witty commitment to preserving the evidence and memory of the folk tradition. Clare collected and recorded material and references to local folk traditions of the Helpston region,[25] material which, from his immersion in folk memory, came to influence and reconstitute his poetic identity. Accompanying these studies were field notes on natural history which Clare amassed, and which, had his plans for publication come about, would have revealed him much earlier than over a century later to have been a poet and naturalist of extraordinary perception: a major participant in the natural history revolution that had long developed, 'parallel with but less noticed than the Industrial Revolution'.[26] Clare's authorship of natural history prose letters[27] was the outcome of his passion to preserve all aspects of his locale and environment. All this is so well documented as to seem pointlessly repetitive except to re-emphasise how Clare disciplined complex feelings, that transmuted his records into a prose imbued with poignant recollection, recently drawn out by Alan Vardy as a process of memorialising.[28] Given the quality of Clare's passionate researches as naturalist and folklorist, he would have been more than capable of empathising with the range of new experiences his



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London friends brought to his attention. In scope and range such experiences marked them out as men of taste, and Clare would be welcomed as such, as a guest, in the politically sympathetic environment of Chantrey's studio, and in Behnes' studio as the subject of the private commission for his portrait. This was in itself an act of celebration and memorialising, an act that drew Clare into the greater current of late Georgian portraiture, which, particularly in sculpture, was frequently characterised by focus upon memory and invocation.

How much Clare would have been aware of the greater currents in which he was a participant is perhaps speculative, yet he was far from naive when he first came to London, having centred early upon the need to re-create himself continually as a professional writer. By the time of his last visit, purpose dictated that he should more than ever find a language precise enough to reflect the complexities of his perceptions accurately. Those London artists who became friends to Clare shared with him an intrinsic need for precision in their professional work. In the studios with which Clare became familiar he would almost certainly have seen technical means deployed as aids to heighten and intensify perception in making images in form, and have observed the discipline required to focus complex technical skills in pursuit of perfection. Whilst it may have been unlikely to tempt the poet to identify with it, the process would have revealed aspirations with which he could sympathise. Discipline in looking and attentiveness became professionally vital to Clare in almost every phase of his life as a poet and naturalist, and consequently he would have been receptive to the way in which the complicated art of sculpture was synonymous with perception subjected to the need for objectivity, powers of self-criticism, techniques adequate to advancing the work, and the capacity for hard work. When he became the subject he witnessed at first hand images that have their origin in the natural world, coming into being and being made different from nature: a contradiction and point of creative similarity which would not have been lost on Clare. During his third visit to London, Clare had had a plaster reproduction made from himself, a life cast by the phrenologist Dr Deville.[29] This comic encounter would not have prepared him for the experience of sitting before the gaze of Henry Behnes and watching his own likeness emerge through techniques and skills that were simultaneously analytical and creative.



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The details of Clare's sittings and the sequential process he observed are best left to another occasion. It is a process with which Clare would have been unfamiliar, although he had sat to painters. Portraiture in sculpture derives from an ancient Indo-European tradition, revitalised in nineteenth-century England through the rise of celebratory and commemorative portraiture as an aspect of English sculpture in the Georgian period, through the work of the anglicised Europeans Louis Roubiliac, Peter Scheemakers, John Michael Rysbrack, and the Englishmen Thomas Banks and Joseph Nollekens, both Royal Academicians. All were to create images that engender the advent of the Victorian cult of the dead, in which the principal commemorative sculptors before and during the early years of Victoria's reign were Francis Chantrey, E. G. Bailey and William Behnes. Portraiture is an intimate collaboration, and Clare was fortunate in his collaborator. Henry Behnes was an able, experienced sculptor, practised in the trials of creative interpretation, who would have had no need of any other source than his model in the search for convincing resolutions. From beginning to end, making a portrait entails intense concentration and scrutiny, being a process of measurement, selection and continual re-assessment. Intuition and intelligence are intensified in the quest for rightness of effect, to re-create a natural structure that emanates from a central point outward, ending at surfaces and transitional points of contrasting pace and quality. The most desirable outcome would be precisely defined by Alberto Giacometti in the illogical proposition 1 + 1 = 3: an image in form, a mnemonic by which the flow of time is arrested.

In the continuing re-evaluation of Clare's life the accumulative effects of the range of his London experiences ought also to be reconsidered. He did not consort with artists of no consequence, as may seem to be the case viewed from the perspective of the post-colonial, artistically post-modern world. The London-based artists who became friends to Clare were men in the prime of their creative and intellectual powers, in the vanguard of their professions, connected to eminent studios, chosen by aristocrats, royalty and prominent clients for commissioned works that remain images reflective of their age. These commissions were sometimes intended for the newly refurbished heart of London, or would become embodied in national secular or ancient religious institutions, images of historical, cultural and international



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significance.[30] Despite politics and the arbitrariness of fashion, they remain redolent of their time, a time to which the studios of Behnes and Chantrey contributed significantly.[31]

Clare's last visit to London was prompted by the need to seek relief from persistent illness and looming depression. The treatment from Dr Darling was marginally beneficial, although proximity to Henry Behnes Burlowe and other friends may well have had a more restorative effect, which was also to prove temporary. During Clare's visits to London he was received as a professional author by his artist friends, who by example and conviction had minor and major roles to play in supporting his resolve to intensify discrimination and extend the limits of his experience in creating exact, eloquent language that would be uniquely his: a prolonged, sustained effort of close concentration for which there was, perhaps, a toll to be exacted. Before Clare abruptly returned to his Other Eden, he sat before the compassionate, professional scrutiny of his friend, keeping company for almost the last time. In November 1834, unaware of Behnes Burlowe's break with his brother and journey to Rome, Clare wrote to him on behalf of his eldest son, seeking advice on drawing and painting, and briefly recalls the company he kept in London, adding 'as for myself I am scarcely able to do anything yet I feel if I could get to London I should soon be right', in the company of sympathetic talents whose wit and support he believed could make him well again.[32]

## NOTES

1. *Dictionary of National Biography*. Thomas Woolner, RA, was permitted to use the initials PRB after his name along with the other five founding members of the Brotherhood including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt. After the commission for the Godley statue his reputation grew and he became the principal figure in Victorian sculpture until his death in 1892. See Benedict Read, 'Thomas Woolner's Godley and the British Statue Overseas', in Mark Stocker (ed), *Remembering Godley* (Auckland, NZ: Hazard Press, 2001), pp. 78-86.
2. *Dictionary of National Biography*; Mary M. Heaton, *The Life of Allan Cunningham* (London, 1879). Cunningham was a loyal friend, secretary and senior technical assistant to Sir Francis Chantrey throughout Chantrey's career. Possessing many talents, Cunningham wrote the six-volume *Lives of the British Painters*, modelled on Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*. He had planned a similar series on the poets of the age.
3. David Powell, *Catalogue of the John Clare Collection in the Northampton Public Library* (Northampton, 1964); *JCSJ*, 8 (1989), 39.



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4. Rupert Guniss, *A Dictionary of British Sculptors 1660-1851* (new revised edition, London: Abbey Library, 1968), pp. 45-8. Behnes exhibited the marble at the Royal Academy in 1818.
5. *Letters*, pp. 409-11, 448-50.
6. *Letters*, pp. 462, 463n2.
7. Guniss, *Dictionary of British Sculptors*, p. 45; *The Art Journal* (1864), pp. 83-4.
8. Guniss, *Dictionary of British Sculptors*, p. 100. Peter Francis Chenu, RA, born 1769, exhibited at the Royal Academy, 1788-1822, and the British Institution, 1811-22; gold medallist, Royal Academy Schools, 1784.
9. Guniss, *Dictionary of British Sculptors*, p. 45; *Art Journal* (1864), pp. 83-4.
10. Henry Weekes, *Lectures in Art* (London, 1873), Lecture XIII, 'Chantrey, Behnes and Gibson', pp. 300-2.
11. Weekes, *Lectures in Art*, pp. 300-2.
12. James Muirhead, *The Life of Watt* (London: John Murray, 1859), pp. 474-5. A pointing machine was a new device for accurately measuring length, extent and depth to assist sculptors in faithful replication from plaster originals to copies cut in marble. The device was a problem in design which exercised Chantrey and his friend James Watt, who had patented their version of a pointing machine as early as 1814.
13. Algernon Graves, *The Royal Academy Exhibitors* (Bath: Kingsmead Reprints, 1970), pp. 166-9; Guniss, pp. 46-8.
14. Guniss, *Dictionary of British Sculptors*, pp. 46-8. Commissioned pieces for the Behnes studio during the period 1818-22 included: Admiral Lord Radstock; The Master of the Rolls, Sir Thomas Plummer; The Bishop of Durham, Shute Barrington; The Duchess of Kent and Cambridge; The President of the Royal Academy, Benjamin West; Lord Barrington. Between 1822 and 1830: Earl Grey; James Christie; The Earl of Egremont; The Duke of York; Lord and Lady Southampton, and the Dukes of Grafton and Cumberland.
15. *Letters*, p. 428; *Midsummer Cushion*, p. 389. There exist four signed and dated versions of William Behnes' portrait of Princess Victoria: a marble bust of the princess dated 1828 (RCIN2028), another marble bust dated 1829 (RCIN35417: see photograph reproduced here on p. 48), a plaster bust of the princess in classical drapes, 1828-29 (RCIN2233), and a Parian ware bust of the princess as a child, 1829 (RCIN52344). All are in the Royal Collection Trust, Windsor Castle (my correspondence with the Trust, 1996, 1997, 2007). A receipt from Sir William Knighton states that on 13 January 1829 Behnes received £84 for his work: far less than Chantrey's charges at the time. For example, in 1829 a fee of 9,000 guineas was agreed for Chantrey's equestrian statue of George IV, now in Trafalgar Square.
16. *Art Journal* (1864), 83.
17. Guniss, *Dictionary of British Sculptors*, p. 70.
18. Henry Weekes, *Lectures on Art, delivered at the Royal Academy, London* (London: Bickers, 1880), pp. 299-302.
19. Guniss, p. 46, quoting from 'Retrospect of a Long Life', vol. II, p. 238.
20. *Art Journal* (1864), 83-4. The obituary is probably by Samuel Hall, who has known the Behnes family since 1820. On artist and former political caricaturist George Cruickshank see Graves, p. 168. A marble bust of Cruickshank by William Behnes was shown at the Royal Academy in 1855. Thomas Woolner's Godley was in the process of being cast into bronze. His earlier emigration to Australia was in part provoked by the rejection of his



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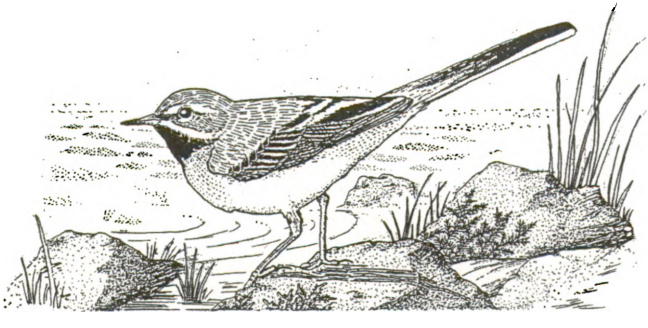
elaborate Pre-Raphaelite memorial for William Wordsworth, intended for Westminster Abbey. He departed for the Australian goldfields in 1852.

21. *Art Journal* (1859), 201-2.
22. Samuel Redgrave, *Dictionary of Artists of the English School* (London, 1878), John Gibson, 1790-1866. In 1821 Gibson received a commission for a marble group, 'Psyche borne by zephyrs', from Wordsworth's patron, Sir George Beaumont. Gibson was an ardent admirer of Greek sculpture whom Henry Weekes considered to be a reactionary, opposed to the new realism. The world of English sculpture was—and is—a truculent domain.
23. E. V. Rippingille, 'Personal Recollections of Artists', *Art Journal* (1859), 201-2. Rippingille thought Gibson ought to have intervened and brought Henry Behnes Burlowe clear of Rome and the eventual cause of his death.
24. *By Himself*, pp. 66-7.
25. See Deacon (1983).
26. Jenny Uglow, *Nature's Engraver: A Life of Thomas Bewick* (London, 2006), p. xviii.
27. *Natural History* (1983).
28. Alan D. Vardy, *John Clare, Politics and Poetry* (London, 2003), pp. 7, 135-66.
29. Deacon (1983), pp. 10-14.
30. *By Himself*, pp. 150-2.
31. Samuel Dunkerley, *Francis Chantrey, Sculptor* (Sheffield: Hallamshire Press, 1995), p. 66. The American President of the Royal Academy, Benjamin West, arranged for Chantrey to receive a commission for a statue of George Washington, for Boston, to be shown to coincide with the United States Exhibition, held in New York in 1826. This piece is now in the New State House, Boston. West had some assistance in Boston from the first American landscape painter, Washington Allston, ARA, who had studied at the Royal Academy Schools under West in 1801-3. Allston's portrait of his long term friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1814) is in the National Portrait gallery, London.
32. *Letters*, p. 617.





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# 'Shadows of Taste': John Clare's Tasteful Natural History

*Sarah Weiger*

> 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush' well every one to his hobby[1]—Clare

Shortly after reading Elizabeth Kent's *Flora Domestica*, a book published by their shared publishers John Taylor and James Hessey, John Clare began reflecting upon what an ideal natural history might look like and began writing a natural history of his own. In 1824 he started sending entries to Hessey as contributions to 'A Natural History of Helpstone', which Clare later decided to call '"Biographys of Birds & Flowers" with an Appendix on Animals & Insects'. As Margaret Grainger notes in her edition of these and other works, *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare*, most of the letters that Clare intended to contribute to 'A Natural History of Helpstone' were never completed, and Hessey did not publish them. Nevertheless, these prose notes, poems, and letters (including his response to Kent's *Flora*, which further embeds many of the flowers Kent mentions within Helpstone folklore, Clare's reading and his own observation) tell us much about how Clare imagined and practiced his own form of natural history.

For Clare, writing natural history was a way of accounting for and celebrating the peculiarities of taste among birds, flowers, insects, and men. I take 'Shadows of Taste' to be an especially important poem in Clare's account of the relationship between taste and the practice of natural history. This relationship can be difficult to track in part because Clare's descriptions of 'the man of taste' and a series of variously related figures—ranging from the 'man of science' to the 'man of feeling'—differ so widely. In 'Shadows of Taste' Clare presents the associative activity of the man of taste as an alternative to the collecting and cataloguing of the traditional man of science or natural historian. In 'Shadows of Taste'(a poem in which the meanings of 'shade' and 'shadow' are multiple) the man of taste exercises his taste through 'associations sweet' that set natural objects and creatures within



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various environmental and literary contexts. His ability to do this depends upon the creatures being left in the homes their own 'shades' of taste have led them to choose. By contrast, the isolating vision and practices of the traditional natural historian remove his specimens from their homes, evacuating the shades of taste that characterize them and leaving them shadows of themselves.

Taste was a fraught matter for Clare. In 'Sketches in the Life of John Clare' and letters to Taylor, Clare expressed his belief that his own taste was 'peculialy' his own. In the 'Sketches' he describes the way he 'try'd' his friends' taste as a child 'by pointing out some striking beauty in a wild flower or object in the surrounding senery':

> I often wondered that, while I was peeping about and finding such quantitys of pleasing things to stop and pause over, another shoud pass me as carless as if he was blind I thought sometimes that I surely had a taste peculialy by myself and that nobody else thought or saw things as I did[2]

Clare expresses a similar sentiment ten years later in a letter replying to Taylor's request that he write a series of essays on the sublime and beautiful. Clare's letter begins by saying, 'I fear you overate my abilities ... I so seldom see other peoples judgments who are considered not only men of taste but men of unerring critisism coinciding with mine that I feel I am only an individual indulging in an erroneous fancy', but he continues more confidently by inveighing against both the 'bomb bursting images' others presented as the sublime and the 'unnatural images cloathed in the pomp of illused words' that others described as beautiful.[3] Clare, who considered these examples the 'vagaries of taste', viewed fashions in taste with contempt; his contempt for fashionable taste and fashionable men of taste seems twinned with a faith in his own taste, however peculiar, and a commitment to defining taste differently.

In 'Shadows of Taste', Clare links taste with a variegated way of viewing nature, and he associates lack of taste with blindness. 'The man of science and of taste' Clare invokes in the poem 'Sees wealth far richer' in the meadows and fields than do the 'vulgar hinds' Clare contrasts him with:

> the low herd, mere savages subdued
> With nought of feeling or of taste imbued
> Pass over sweetest scenes a carless eye
> As blank as midnight in its deepest dye[4]



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Clare's description of the eye as 'blank as midnight in its deepest dye' reminds us of his related description of the Linnaean classification system as a 'hard nick-namy sy[s]tem of unuterable words' that only overloads botany 'in mystery till it makes darkness visable'.[5] In both descriptions, Clare emphasizes that the object of perception is obscured rather than illuminated by the faculty of perception or system of organization used to observe it: the blankness of the 'carless eye' of the low herd is as deeply dyed as midnight and obstructs rather than facilitates sight, just as the mystery with which the Linnaean classification system overloads botany obscures the lack of real knowledge it provides with a Miltonic visible darkness. These forms of darkness block from view not only the sweet scenes through which the low herd passes and the plants the Linnaean man of science classifies, but also the many associations Clare claims such scenes and plants inspire in the man of taste. Like the shadows that feature prominently in Clare's prose and verse sketches of the natural world and the paintings of DeWint he admires, the literary, historical, and environmental associations of the man of taste play around the objects of his perception, providing a shifting contextual background for them rather than obscuring them in darkness as the careless eye and the Linnaean classification system do. I believe these associations are the 'shadows of taste' for which the poem is named and that the lively associational activity of the man of taste (and, as we shall see, of the plants, animals, and insects that also exercise taste) produces a richly contextualized form of natural history that Clare strove to write.

In a letter Clare may have intended for his autobiography, he introduces the 'poetic feeling' with which he regards nature:

> I love to look on nature with a poetic feeling which magnifys the pleasure I love to see the nightingale in its hazel retreat & the cuckoo hiding in its solitudes of oaken foliage & not to examine their carcasses in glass cases yet naturalists & botanists seem to have no taste for this poetical feeling they merely make collections of dryd specimens classing them after Leanius into tribes & familys & there they delight to show them as a sort of ambitious fame with them 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush' well every one to his hobby[6]



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Clare might as well have said, 'to each his own' or even 'there's no accounting for taste' when he says 'every one to his hobby', but instead he seems concerned to emphasize that the naturalist has 'no taste' for the 'poetical feeling' Clare claims for himself and for the man of taste. Clare acknowledges that he is as happy as the naturalist or botanist in 'finding a new spieces of field flower or butter flye' he has not seen before, but he protests that he has 'no desire further to dry the plant or torture the Butterflye by sticking it on a cork board with a pin'. Instead, he says, he would prefer that the 'fluttering butterflye ... settle till [he] can come up with it to examine the powderd colours on its wings' (39). Here Clare's taste is for a living butterfly rather than a dead one whose demise he imagines as painful; but it is also a preference for context, a context visible to the 'poetic eye'. In sticking the butterfly upon a cork board, the naturalist Clare envisions shakes off the coloured pollen that might stick at the moment of its observation and isolates it in a new and barren environment. The specimen is thus stripped of its context and abstracted into an environment that approaches contextlessness—perhaps with a Linnaean label that only makes 'darkness visable'.

In this letter, as in 'Shadows of Taste', there are at least two varieties of contextual darkness. Clare distinguishes the time the 'rustic' or 'clown' spends in nature from that spent by the botanist, but believes that both walk with blinkers of sorts: the rustic, despite seeing a plant in its original setting, sees it only as a plant while the botanist or naturalist, taking it out of context, sees it only as a particular *type* of plant. The poetic eye of the man of taste, by contrast, sees the plant in various contexts—environmental, historical, and literary. In the same letter, Clare writes about the literary associations that arise in the man of taste when experiencing nature:

> a clown may say that he loves the Morning but a man of taste feels it in a higher degree by bringing up in his mind that beautiful line of Thompsons 'The meek eyd morn appears mother of dews' The rustic sings beneath the evening moon but it brings no associations he knows nothing about miltons description of it (41)

The key difference between the rustic, the man of science, and the man of taste, then, is the latter's ability to associate natural objects with literary passages. While the rustic 'turns an eye' on flowers and 'plods bye', 'the man of taste looks upon the little



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Celadine in Spring & mutters in his mind some favourite lines from Wordsworths address to that flower' (41). This associative ability, more than allowing the man of taste simply to see the flower before him, allows him to see it as it is illuminated and enlivened by its literary context. The man of taste synthesizes the environmental, historical, and literary contexts of the objects he views into an associational, contextual field. As Clare proclaims near the end of the letter, 'If I had the means to consult & the health to indulge it I shoud crowd these letters on Natural History with lucious scraps of Poesy from my favourite Minstrels & make them less barren of amusment & more profitable of perusal' (41). Clare's 'scraps of poesy' convey life-giving context to accounts of natural objects, suggesting that natural and literary histories cannot be separated except to their mutual detriment. He presents the associational activity of the man of taste (here himself) as a mode of productivity that shares more with the tasteful activities of the birds and plants he describes in 'Shadows of Taste' than it does with the blank carelessness of the rustic or the classification schemes of the naturalist.

Despite Clare's protestations against the way of seeing (or *not* seeing) employed by the 'rustics' or 'clowns' in his passages on taste, his interest in the local names for flowers and the village rhymes that use them attests to a corresponding respect for what a commonly used name might reveal to a person of taste about the relationship between people and the plants and insects with which they interact. In a separate letter to Taylor, Clare connects taste with a preference for common names. In defence of his use of the name 'Woodseers' for a species of insect, Clare argues, 'wether it be the proper name I don't know tis what we call them & that you know is sufficient for us'. Though the *us* refers clearly enough to the people of Clare's locality, it also rather winningly includes Taylor. Several sentences earlier in the letter Clare writes that Taylor is a man whose 'taste is preferable to any [Clare has] witnessed' because he is 'a man of feeling that looks on faults with indulgence & never willfuly passes by a blossom he may chance to find on his journey'.[7] Clare's confidence in Taylor's ability to recognize 'woodseer' as the only appropriate term for the insect springs from his flattering identification of Taylor as a man of taste and feeling who cares little for the judgments of other men and does not overlook the natural history a word like 'Woodseers' might contain and reveal (as Clare notes in the letter, the woodseer



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was 'one of the shepherds weather glasses', believed to foresee by the turn of its head the arrival of fair or wet weather).

Clare's various notions of taste, especially as they inflect literary and natural history, converge in 'Shadows of Taste', a poem that refuses to pass by any blossom in its accounting of taste as something as substantial and embedded in its environmental context (no matter how well hidden) as any blossom. Taste is also a faculty as likely to be held by an insect or plant as a person. Within the first six lines of the poem, taste is both something that we see and something that we see with. It is visible in the world and a faculty of choice that all beings inherit:

> Taste with as many hues doth hearts engage
> As leaves & flowers do upon natures page
> Not mind alone the instinctive mood declares
> But birds & flowers & insects are its heirs
> Taste is their joyous heritage & they
> All choose for joy in a peculiar way (1-6)

Taste in these lines is something inherited and declared by its possessors. As the poem progresses, it becomes clear that this taste can nevertheless only be recognized by a viewer who also has taste. Clare sets up this recognition as a form of reading by invoking nature as a page, but he immediately expands reading beyond the province of the human mind: 'Not mind alone the instinctive mood declares, / But birds and flowers and insects are its heirs—'. Thus the flowers 'upon nature's page' that might engage our taste themselves practice taste as a faculty of choice that is nevertheless tied to their natural history or 'joyous heritage'. The first two thirds of the poem is a rich, tasteful natural history of birds, flowers, and insects whose various shades of taste lead them to 'choose for joy in a peculiar way' by making their home in 'leaf-darkened woods', streams, or 'barren roads'. By suspending the creatures' faculty of taste between the ability of each creature freely to 'choose for joy' and the practice of their 'joyous heritage', Clare urges us to refrain from deciding whether these home-making choices are free or determined. While joy infuses each of these impulses, their suspension between freedom and determination is an important component of Clare's conception of natural history as made up of the peculiar choices all creatures make within a continuous, inherited framework. In his book *John Clare and Picturesque Landscape,* Timothy Brownlow defines 'natural taste' in Clare as the refinement of inherited instincts in the face of



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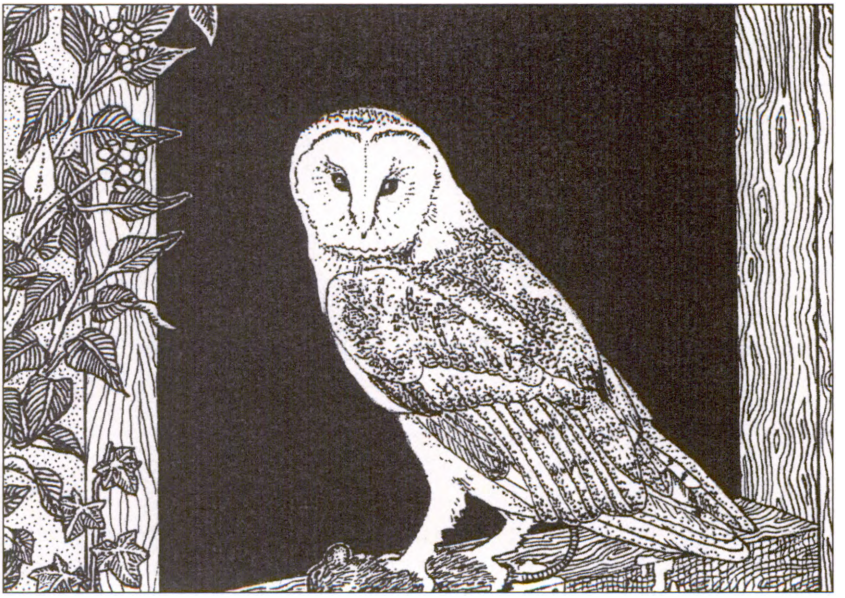

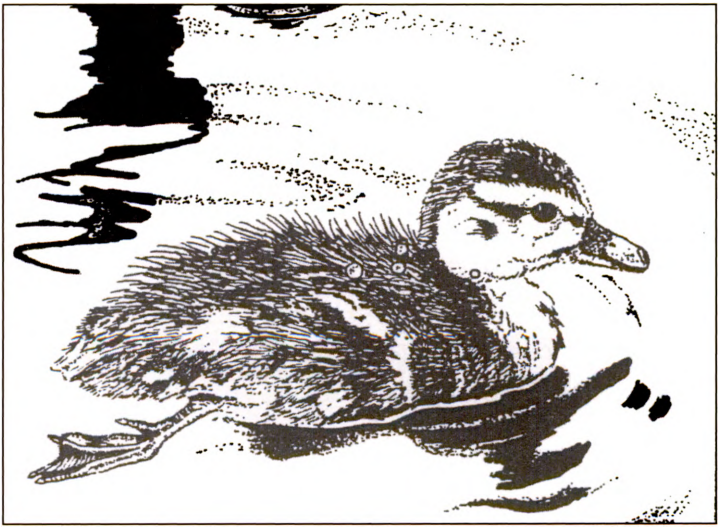



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particular circumstances. He quotes Jay Appleton's thesis in *The Experience of Landscape*: 'the individual creature interacts with its environment in a manner which, in the most general sense, is common to its species, but in detail is peculiar to itself'.[8] Brownlow offers birdsong, which, as Clare knew, is generally similar within a species but particular to any one member of that species. However, Brownlow does not raise the issue that Clare's primary interest in 'Shadows of Taste' is to explore the way taste operates in the home-making choices of individual creatures. Thus 'Birds own [taste] in the various spots they choose' (7). Therefore, 'Shadows of Taste' explores how creatures embed themselves within particular contexts by choosing their homes, and this decision, the result of a fine balance between inheritance and choice, reveals—and produces—the taste of each home-making creature.

Amidst the parade of these creatures and their 'unnumbered hues' are the shades of taste manifested in the various men who populate the poem. At the centre of 'Shadows of Taste' is a man of taste who reminds us of Clare himself, who liked to look at nature with a 'poetic feeling'. The poetic associations of this man of taste provide a second home for the creatures he observes, embedding them within a literary context with the same 'wisdom of creative choice' that characterizes their home-making. In this sense, 'Shadow of Taste' is not, as Jonathan Bate has suggested of Clare's work more broadly, 'the record of his search for a home in the world', so much as it is the record of his search for a home for the world in his poetry.[9]

Clare describes the lasting quality of the relationship between poetry and nature, which he calls at its best the 'true sublime', in terms that echo Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' in their invocation of ceaseless activity. In a poem, the poet says,

> A blossom in its witchery of bloom
> There gathered dwells in beauty & perfume
> The singing bird the brook that laughs along
> There ceasless sing & never thirsts for song
> A pleasing image to its page conferred
> In living character & breathing word
> Becomes a landscape heard & felt & seen
> Sunshine & shade one harmonizing green
> Where meads & brooks & forrests basking lie
> Lasting as truth & the eternal sky
> Thus truth to nature as the true sublime
> Stands a mount atlas overpeering time (67-78)



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This invocation of poetry as a lasting residence for elements of the natural world (it is *there* that blooms are gathered and *there* that birds perpetually sing, Clare emphasizes with the anaphora 'There...There...Where') seems to be integral to his understanding of the potential of natural history. The expression of nature in poetry and the expression of poetry in nature is itself tasteful insofar as it is true, and this truth is predicated upon a larger sense of order or fitness in the world between its inhabitants' creative activity and their contexts. Clare thus radically extends Wordsworth's belief that:

> the individual Mind
> (And the progressive powers perhaps no less
> Of the whole species) to the external world
> Is fitted; and how exquisitely too—
> Theme this but little heard of among men—
> The external world is fitted to the mind[10]

For Clare this fitness is not restricted to the 'individual Mind' or even to the 'progressive powers... / Of the whole species', but is available to all creatures, for whom taste or instinct is a creative activity that the poet recognizes as akin to or even identical with his own: 'Not mind alone the instinctive mood declares / But birds and flowers and insects are its heirs—' (3-4).

We can analogize this kind of fitness, as W. John Coletta does in his article, 'Ecological Aesthetics and the Natural History Poetry of John Clare', to the ecological understanding of the 'interdependence' of elements in natural communities. Coletta points in particular to Clare's prescient illustrations of what ecologist Eugene Odum has called mature, or climax, communities, and adapts Odum's definition of 'interdependence' as 'a measure of a system's ability to adapt to circumstance or even to adapt circumstance to itself' to Clare's notion of 'taste'. Coletta believes it is possible to translate 'the ecological concept of interdependence ... into an aesthetic principle of the interdependence of images...[which] may all ultimately be seen as part of an interdependent ecological and aesthetic whole' in Clare's poetry. Coletta goes on to describe 'Clare's ecology of mind...in which the inner and outer landscapes are fitted to one another as organism is fitted to environment'.[11] The fitting of inner and outer landscapes Coletta describes as Clare's ecology of mind is analogous to the interdependence, or fit, he sees between ecology and aesthetics in Clare's poetry. Coletta suggests that this



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fitting strengthens and sustains the poetry despite the diversity of images it presents. Indeed, the series of images in 'Shadows of Taste' depend for their significance upon the interdependence of their parts. Each object and association in the system of images, seeming to vie for position in the busy scene, can also be seen to depend upon all others and to fit together.

John Barrell views the relationship of images in Clare's poetry as a more competitive one than Coletta's chosen term, 'interdependence', might imply. In Barrell's discussion of Clare's presentation of complex landscapes, Clare's attention is constantly torn between his awareness of the *particularity* of objects and their *multiplicity* within the larger scene. The particularity of objects, Barrell says, calls for Clare's attention and separates them from their background as '*too* striking to be contained in a properly composed landscape'. At the same time, such objects are so multiple that 'we have the sense always that outside the poem are hundreds of images hammering to be admitted'. Their 'overwhelming multiplicity', Barrell says, is a threat to Clare's desire to attend to each one of them.[12] But it is just this hammering of images apparently without end that sustains the shifting network of associations that comprise the man of taste's natural history.

The objects in 'Shadows of Taste' never stand alone. They are a breeding—and feeding—ground for the associations and ideas of the man of taste: 'Associations sweet each object breeds / And fine ideas upon fancy feeds' (133-4). Moreover, these associations depend less upon the objects themselves than they do upon the objects' environments: the man of taste doesn't love flowers 'because they shed perfumes', or butterflies for their 'painted plumes' or even birds for their singing alone. Instead, he loves their home, the 'wild and meadow lea': 'There hath the flower its dwelling place & there / The butterfly goes dancing through the air' (139-140). And although Clare opens up his notion of 'taste' in 'Shadows of Taste' to include a wide spectrum of shades—'taste runs riot in her every grade' (48)—the cohesion of these shades seems to depend upon the associational activity of the man of taste, who is able to see the shades in their present environmental context as parts of a larger, shared natural and literary history. His ability to do this, the speaker warns at the close of the poem, is dependent upon natural objects being left in their homes:



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Associations sweet each object breeds
& fine ideas upon fancy feeds
[...]
But take these several beings from their homes
Each beautious thing a withered thought becomes
Association fades & like a dream
They are but shadows of the things they seem (133-4, 147-150)

In some sense, the title 'Shadows of Taste' also refers to this decontextualized form of natural and literary history, one in which the shades of taste described in the poem become shadows of themselves: the butterfly with the pollen shaken off its wings, the celandine without Wordsworth's beautiful mention of it.

In additionally drafted lines for the poem, Clare explicitly connects such shadows of taste (objects deprived of their tastes and the associations of the man of taste) with the traditional activities of the natural historian, including the collection of specimens and their classification. He does so within a larger discussion of the associations that inspire joy in the man of taste:

The man of taste in fine ideas feeds
Assosiations that give birth to joys
[...]
But take the orchis from its mossy steeps
& buttey flyes to entemoligize
Classd in choise boxes
& birds encaged to sing a prisoners song
The man of taste half looses all he felt
The joys of freedom & they all their own
Their choice & joy creates the like in him
& pleasure there inspires in him the joy
Joys principal[e] exist with them
& he recieves the interest as his due[13]

The 'fine ideas' that feed the associations that 'give birth' to the joys of the man of taste depend upon and take their cue from the ability of the creatures he observes to make choices freely in the setting in which they have chosen to live.

Clare closes 'Shadows of Taste' and strings his images together both ecologically and aesthetically with his presentation of a 'warped and punished trunk of stunted oak', which has been 'Freed from its bonds' of ivy by a thunder-stroke. The oak's survival facilitates its use as a home for birds and also, it seems, as a home for the string of images that precede it, which seem to owe



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their lively being to its perseverance in the 'desolate neglected spot / That seems in labour's hurry left forgot', a place noticed and appreciated only by the man of taste (141-2). By choosing to highlight the perseverance of the oak and its transformation into a lively habitat rather than emphasizing the 'bomb bursting' image of the thunder-stroke that felled it, Clare privileges the preservative potential of the tree, a potential that is especially apparent throughout his work in his treatment of thunder-struck trees and dotterel stumps.

Clare encounters these trees with a forceful ambivalence about how to approach their loss and destruction. Battered, broken, and traumatized trees, in particular, appear throughout his work. As Tim Fulford points out in his article, 'Cowper, Wordsworth, Clare: The Politics of Trees', trees were for Clare both landmarks and 'selfmarks,' that were more properly the property of the poet in his intimate relationship with them than of the land-owners who often flagrantly destroyed them. Fulford claims that in his treatment of them Clare 'dramatize[s] loss and destruction without a compensatory discovery of a remaining power and unity in [his] own mind'; his language 'operates according to an aesthetics of weakness—an intimation of loss, dismemberment and oblivion rather than immortality'.[14] But as often as Clare's descriptions of broken trees seem to accord with this 'aesthetics of weakness', they also sometimes lead the poet to reflect upon their continued life, in some form or another, or upon their continued ability to provide shelter to the people and animals whose lives they share. In a short prose passage headed 'TASTE', Clare notes that 'there is happiness in lolling over the old shivered trunks & fragments of a ruined tree destroyed some years since by lightening & mossing & wasting away into everlasting decay'.[15] Through the 'poetic eye' that lingers over broken trees, Clare encounters and re-imagines a natural environment as a literary text; this attention develops an aesthetic strain of natural continuances through which environments or contexts thrive despite change. In fact, these changes register the evolution of contexts that unfold as natural history itself unfolds. Put differently, interdependence makes the evolution of contexts possible because it refuses to abandon any of its parts, each part being critical to every other.

The radical form of interdependence Clare describes in these examples crosses the boundaries between the non-human and human, the natural and the poetic. The 'lucious scraps of Poesy' with which Clare wished to crowd his letters on natural history, and



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the rich poetry he wrote himself on natural historical topics, were a way of bestowing his beloved objects of study with significance rather than stripping it away from them. Acknowledging the peculiarity of their tastes and trusting his own, Clare guarantees that all creatures might inherit the ability to 'choose for joy' well into the future.

## NOTES

1. John Clare, 'Natural History Letter III', in *Natural History*, p. 38. Further references to *Natural History* are cited parenthetically by page number within the text. 'Shadows of Taste' appears in *Middle Period*, III, pp. 303-310.
2. *By Himself*, p. 17.
3. Draft to Taylor, after Friday, April 15, 1831, *Letters*, p. 539.
4. *Middle Period*, III, p. 305, ll. 49-52.
5. *By Himself*, p. 189. In describing the Linnaean classification system as a 'hard nick-namy sy[s]tem of unuterable words' that only overloads botany 'in mystery till it makes darkness visable', Clare alludes to Milton's description in *Paradise Lost* of the flames of Hell, from which come no light, but rather 'darkness visible'.
6. *Natural History*, pp. 38-9.
7. *Letters*, pp. 162, 163.
8. Timothy Brownlow, *John Clare and Picturesque Landscape* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 128, 129.
9. Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 153.
10. William Wordsworth, 'Home at Grasmere', in *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ll. 1006-11, p. 198.
11. W. John Coletta, 'Ecological Aesthetics and the Natural History Poetry of John Clare', *JCSJ*, 14 (1995), 30, 38-9, 42.
12. John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 151, 153.
13. Additional lines, *Middle Period*, III, p. 310, ll. 1-2, 11-20.
14. Timothy Fulford, 'Cowper, Wordsworth, Clare: The Politics of Trees', *JCSJ*, 14 (1995), 58.
15. *Natural History*, p. 282.



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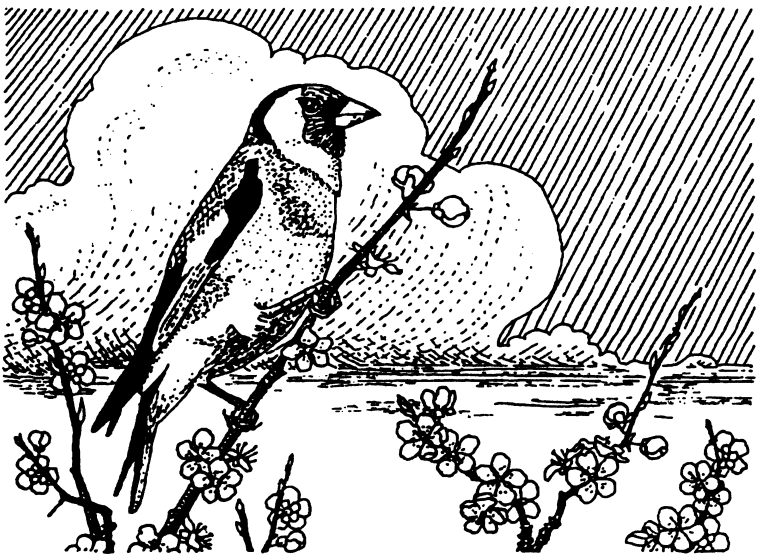



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# An Uncatalogued Review of *Poems Descriptive* *Dublin Inquisitor*, January 1821

*Simon Kövesi*

The anonymous review that follows seems to be unknown to Clare scholarship. Incongruously sandwiched between reviews of the novels *Melmoth the Wanderer* by Charles Maturin and *Gwelygordd* by Charles Lucas, this largely favourable response to Clare's *Poems Descriptive* appeared in the first edition of the short-lived *Dublin Inquisitor*, in January 1821. If it is true that the review has been unseen by Clare scholars, the *Dublin Inquisitor* has been equally overlooked by bibliographers of Irish magazines and periodicals.[1] The review has been brought to light by the remarkable resource housed online at Google Book Search <books.google.com>. Here are stored electronic facsimiles of the collections of some of the world's greatest libraries. As a result, original editions of all manner of texts are more widely accessible than ever before: the resource now includes searchable facsimiles of all four of Clare's lifetime selections for example. The *Dublin Inquisitor* review is an indicator of what can be found when obscure printed books are made available through new technologies.

The text below maintains the spelling, italicisation, punctuation, and, as much as possible, the setting of the original.[2] A few explanatory endnotes have been added.



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*"Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery," by John Clare, a Northamptonshire Peasant.*
London, Taylor and Hessey, 1820

The interest of this little volume is enhanced by the circumstances attending its publication; and our readers cannot sufficiently appreciate its merits till they are informed of the personal history of the author. His father, Parker Clare, was laborer to a farmer, but through poverty and sickness became helpless, and is now a pauper on the parish, at five shillings per week. John was born at Helpstone, near Peterborough, Northamptonshire, 13th July, 1793. He early evinced a taste for study, and through three years contrived occasionally to save as much pence as paid for schooling at broken periods, and at the end of that time he was able to read the Bible. The first books which he had an opportunity of reading were the Seasons, Robinson Crusoe, and a Poem by Pomfret. By these he was instantly attracted; and, pursuing his desire for knowledge, he learned to write from the kind instruction of Mr. John Turnill. He cultivated his mind in silence and misfortune for thirteen years.

"In December 1818, Mr. Edward Drury, Bookseller, Stamford, met by chance with the Sonnet to the setting Sun, written on a piece of paper in which a letter had been wrapt up, and signed J. C. Having ascertained the name and residence of the writer, he went to Helpstone, where he saw some other poems with which he was much pleased. At his request Clare made a collection of the pieces he had written, and added some others to them. They were then sent to London for the opinion of the publishers, and they selected those which form the present volume."

The destinies that ruled the fates of Otway and Chatterton, led them through distress and sorrow to the tomb—they both died of want; and it is melancholy to observe the misfortunes which almost invariably accompany Genius, as if there was a spell about her that shut out the consolation and assistance which is offered to common misery—

In the woods of the North, there are insects that prey
On the brains of the elk 'till his very last sigh—
Oh! Genius, thy patrons, more cruel than they,
Just feed on thy brains, and then leave thee to die![3]



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We will not name *him* whose death was the occasion of these lines.

It has been remarked that Genius is of no country and no condition; and Burns, Bloomfield, and Hogg illustrate the observation; in the bold and original composition of the first there is a wildness and a disdain of rules and shackles that is highly characteristic—he followed no precedent, but was himself all nature—all beauty; in the second, there is much simplicity and pathos; and the third not unfrequently bursts forth with all the fire and superiority of his great predecessor; but amidst these names we should not forget our own lamented Dermody[4]—we mourn over his memory with painful feelings; in the unfortunate spirit of his country, he exulted with inordinate triumph during the moments of success, and sunk forgotten and neglected,

> Like a full ear of corn,
> Whose blossom 'scaped, but 's withered in the ripening![5]

These are great names:—Burns was a ploughman, Bloomfield a mechanic, Hogg an Ettrick shepherd, Dermody a country boy—and we have now to add Clare, a Northamptonshire peasant.

Poems that spring from strong feelings, and a mind unbiassed by classical bonds, are generally local and personal; and a man who does not study the graces of expression, nor follow the peculiarities of style, is more likely to be natural, and less liable to fall into imitation, than those who attempt embellishments and figures, perhaps beyond their judgment. Of the former class is Mr Clare; the wooded hills—the rivers—the vallies and the mountains, are the books he studies; and although his sentiments sometimes clash with the thoughts of others, yet they are evidently original, from the manner in which they are expressed. We cannot, however, avoid remarking the resemblance that exists here and there between some of his verses and those of Burns—we select the following:

> Advice, sweet warbler, don't despise it:
> None knows what's what, but he that tries it;
> And then he well knows how to prize it,
> And so do I:
> Thy case with mine I sympathise it,
> With many a sigh.—p. 15.
>
> * * * *
>
> O independence! oft I bait ye;
> How blest I'd be to call ye matey!



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Ye fawning flattering slaves I hate ye:
Mad, harum-scarum!
If rags and tatters under-rate me,
Free still I'll wear 'em.—p. 89.

Our author is extremely natural in his descriptions of rural life; he delineates what passes every day in his own mind, and before his eyes; and when he raises compassion for the misfortunes of the poor peasants, he excites our pity for himself. We cannot avoid extracting the following picture of Labor from an *"Address to Plenty."*

Toiling in the naked fields,
Where no bush a shelter yields,
Needy labor dithering stands,
Beats and blows his numbing hands;
And upon the crumping snows
Stamps in vain to warm his toes.
Leaves are fled that once had power
To resist a summer shower;
And the wind so piercing blows,
Winnowing small the drifting snows,
The summer shade of loaded bough
Would vainly boast a shelter now:
Piercing snows so searching fall,
They sift a passage thro' them all.
Tho' all's vain to keep him warm,
Poverty must brave the storm.
Friendship none, its aid to lend:
Health alone his only friend;
Granting leave lo live in pain,
Giving strength to toil in vain;
To be, while winter's horrors last,
The sport of every pelting blast.—p. 47-8.

There is a simplicity about this that has been rarely equalled; the recollections of L'Allegro stole over us: but Milton is all the scholar—Clare the poet of Nature. Amongst other pieces which this little volume contains, we noticed two—the *"Summer Morning"* and *"Summer Evening,"* and we have seldom met with descriptions of country life altogether so beautiful and unaffected. His talents, however, are not confined to this kind of Poetry, for he is capable of bold and animated thoughts.—The following is a specimen:



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*Sonnet.——A Winter Scene.*

Hail, scenes of desolation and despair,
  Keen winter's overbearing sport and scorn!
Torn by his rage, in ruins as you are,
  To me more pleasing than a summer's morn
Your shattered state appears;—despoiled and bare,
  Stript of your clothing, naked and forlorn:
Yes, winter's havock! wretched as you shine,
  Dismal to others as your fate may seem,
Your fate is pleasing to this heart of mine,
  Your wildest horrors I the most esteem.
The ice-bound floods, that still with rigour freeze,
  The snow-clothed valley, and the naked tree,
These sympathising scenes my heart can please,
  Distress is their's—and they resemble me.

Of the wild and picturesque, we could not select a better example than this little Sonnet:

*The Gipsey's Evening Blaze.*

To me how wildly pleasing is that scene,
  That doth present, in evening's dusky hour,
A group of Gipseys, entered on the green,
  In some warm nook where Boreas has no power;
Where sudden starts the quivering blaze behind
  Short, shrubby bushes, nibbled by the sheep,
  That mostly on the short sward pastures keep;
Now lost, now seen, now bending with the wind:
And now the swarthy sybil kneels reclined,
  With proggling stick she still renews the blaze,
  Forming bright sparks to twinkle from the flaze.
When this I view, the all-attentive mind
  Will oft exclaim (so strong the scene pervades)
  "Grant me this life, thou spirit of the shades!"

There is a philosophy in the human mind which science may refine, but cannot improve—it is that which enables us to reason on our own misfortunes and infirmities, and to bear our distresses with firmness in the anticipation of a future change: the strong mind can argue itself into calm and undisturbed resignation without one principle of logic, and can select for its improvement a hundred lessons from the incidents that pass around it, without deducing a single moral from the wisdom



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of books. Such is the philosophy of John Clare—and what heart will not be convinced of its value from the perusal of the following lines:

*On a lost Greyhound, found in the Snow.*

* * * * * *

For dogs, as men, are equally
  A link of nature's chain,
Formed by that hand that formed me,
  Which formeth nought in vain.
All life contains, as 'twere by chains,
  From him still perfect are;
Nor does he think the meanest link
  Unworthy of his care.

So let us both on him rely,
  And he'll for us provide;
Find us a shelter warm and dry
  And every thing beside.
And while fools, void of sense, deride
  My tenderness to thee;
I'll take thee home, from whence I've come;
  So rise and gang with me.

The unpleasant part of our duty yet remains.—We have selected some of the beauties of these Poems, and we have yet to shew some of their defects. That he has written ungrammatically or incorrectly, we should not, perhaps, pause to condemn—considering the circumstances of his education. The following are glaring solecisms:

Resolved never *more* to behold you *again*.—p. 144.
*Demeanor's softness* in thy crimpled face.—p. 109.

But we must own that the line

Thou little insect infinitely small.—p. 200.

contains an impropriety which we are surprised the publishers passed without notice.

He often uses peculiar expressions—sometimes perfectly novel—frequently making verbs of adjectives, &c.



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Springs pencil *pinks* thee in thy *blushy* stain,
And summer glistens in thy *tinty* flower.—p. 109.

He has also another peculiarity, which is that of contracting words to accommodate the metre—

E'en *'plaining* flies to thee have spoke.—p. 100.
Our meeting *'minds* me of a pleasant hour.—p. 109.
Sleep *'gins* close the labourer's eye.—p. 125.

We will now take leave of Mr. Clare, and would add, that he is one of those whom we will be glad to meet often; there is an originality about him which we admire; but that honest disdain of power and wealth—that independence of spirit—that natural pride of heart—are all—all Burns'; and Clare wants the bursts of feeling—the bold and careless, yet nervous expressions that belong so peculiarly to the other. We think that if he would attach himself to the composition of a poem of some length, he would bring his genius to a trial where it would meet better success—these short and desultory pieces have but limited circulation, while an interesting fiction never wants admirers.

## NOTES

1. No reference to the *Dublin Inquisitor* review appears in any of the existing Clare literature, including *Critical Heritage*, Barbara Estermann, *John Clare: An Annotated Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985) and H. O. Dendurent, *John Clare: A Reference Guide*, ed. by Marilyn Gaull (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1978). More puzzlingly the *Dublin Inquisitor* is uncatalogued by surveys and bibliographies of periodicals of the period, such as: Tom Clyde, *Irish Literary Magazines: An Outline History and Descriptive Bibliography* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003); *Three Hundred Years of Irish Periodicals*, ed. by Barbara Hayley and Enda McKay (Gigginstown: Lilliput Press, 1987); D. Kennedy, *Union List of Current Periodicals and Serials in Dublin Libraries* (Dublin: Irish Association for Documentation, 1959); Alvin Sullivan, *British Literary Magazines* (New York and London: Greenwood, 1983-6). The *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. by Joanne Shattock, Vol. 4, 1800-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) does mention the *Inquisitor*, but only as the site of a review of Walter Scott's *Kenilworth*, and it is not indexed elsewhere. Francis Espinasse refers to the magazine in the *Dictionary of National Biography* in the entry for writer and editor Robert Bell (1800-1867), who was a founding contributor to the *Dublin Inquisitor*, and who later became proprietor of the *Monthly Chronicle*.



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2. The copy text is *The Dublin Inquisitor*, 1 (January 1821), pp. 58-63. It is stocked by the Harvard College Library (which is the copy available via Google Book Search), the National Library of Ireland, the British Library and Cambridge University Library.
3. These lines are slightly misquoted from Thomas Moore (1779-1852), 'Lines on the Death of Sh-r-d-n' (Richard Brinsley Sheridan, [1751–1816]). The original stanza appears with an interesting footnote, as follows:

   In the woods of the North there are insects that prey
   On the brain of the elk till his very last sigh;*
   Oh, Genius! thy patrons, more cruel than they,
   First feed on thy brains, and then leave thee to die!

   * Naturalists have observed that, upon dissecting an elk, there was found in its head some large flies, with its brain almost eaten away by them.—*History of Poland.*

   *The Fudge Family in Paris* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1818), p. 164.
4. Thomas Dermody (1775–1802), was a precocious, poor Irish poet from Ennis, County Clare, who fell on hard times and died young, partly due to persistent alcoholism. See James Grant Raymond, *The Life of Thomas Dermody* (London: William Miller, 1806) and *Dictionary of National Biography*.
5. These lines are slightly misquoted from Thomas Otway (1652-1685), *Venice Preserv'd: or, a Plot Discover'd*. The original quotation reads: 'Yet now must fall like a full Ear of Corn, / Whose Blossom scap'd, yet's wither'd in the ripening.' Act 1, Scene 1, *The Works of Mr. Thomas Otway* (London: C. Hitch and L. Hawes et al, 1757), p. 231.



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# Reviews

*John Clare and the Imagination of the Reader*. By PAUL CHIRICO. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2007. xi + 222 pp. £45.

It is ten years since Hugh Haughton published his review essay on Zachary Leader's *Revision and Romantic Authorship* (*JCSJ*, 17, 1998), in which he confronts the knotty question of editorial policy and where authority is to be located in Clare's texts. Haughton makes a plea for a modern edition with 'multiple or plural texts, recording all information relevant to the editorial and publication process' (p.71). In particular, he contends that for poems published in Clare's lifetime we need John Taylor's published version, plus (where possible) an authoritative manuscript version and a modern reading version. A move in this direction has been made in Tim Chilcott's edition of *The Shepherd's Calendar* (Carcanet, 2006). Although this does not give either a 'modern reading version' or a complete text of the 1827 volume, it nevertheless does pair the Taylor text with the manuscript version submitted to him by Clare. In the ten years since Haughton's essay scholars such as Leader, Chilcott and Alan Vardy have recognised the importance of evaluating Clare's work within its publishing context. As Haughton puts it: 'The construction of John Clare's poetic identity was not worked out in the fields or by the fireside in Helpston or Northborough alone, it was forged in the process of publication' (*JCSJ*, 17, 1998, 70). Paul Chirico's new book makes a weighty contribution to the understanding of Clare in this wider literary and publishing context. Building on and acknowledging the work of his predecessors, he knocks another nail into the coffin of Clare as a self-confessed naïf, a labourer who found the poems in the fields and simply wrote them down. Rather, Chirico argues, Clare was acutely aware of and actively engaged with questions of cultural lineage and the business of writing. What makes Chirico's analysis distinctive is his attention to Clare's interest in and anxiety about the reception of his poems, as the title of his monograph implies. This title is intriguingly ambiguous, but the introduction makes clear that Chirico's concern is with the imagined reader; his aim is to show that Clare's poetry, 'through its characteristic deviation from the norms of spelling, grammar, diction and punctuation, and through less noted techniques such as repetition and quotation, provokes and directs the responses of its readers; its linguistic artifice constructs the eccentric experience of its implied audience' (p.18).

One theme of this book is the anxiety of reputation. However, it is also about the anxiety of influence, an anxiety which in Clare's case is complicated by his socio-economic status. Chirico supports his argument about Clare's cultural awareness and his aspirations to membership of the literary community, past, present and future, with analyses of his correspondence with his publishers, Taylor and Hessey, and of poems (both well-known and less familiar) that are addressed to, or are about fellow poets: Keats, Yearsley, Adcock, Bloomfield, Byron, Darley and Wordsworth. Hindered by his marginality—geographical, economic



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and cultural—Chirico argues, Clare used intertextuality, or, to put it less theoretically, compulsive allusiveness, as one way of joining that literary community: 'his engagement with other literary texts was so close that some of his works ... could best be termed collaborative' (p.47). Chirico is not the first to comment on this characteristic of Clare's work (Hugh Haughton writes about the poet's 'ventriloquistic art'), but he does take it in new directions: for instance, by looking more closely at the relationship between Clare and Keats. Since the two men never met, their 'shadowy' relationship was inevitably a matter of words: words, moreover, that, one way or another, were largely mediated through their shared publisher, John Taylor. Clare, initially the more successful poet commercially speaking, and of course the longer lived, comments on Keats's poetry in his letters and in the sonnet, 'The world, its hopes, and fears, have pass'd away', meditating upon the vagaries of his critical reception, and on his untimely death, reflecting on ideas of posterity and popularity. Through close analysis of these writings, Chirico teases out the complex nature of Clare's relationship with Keats, which contributed to his sense of literary community and to his own sense of his relationship with his readers. Furthermore, through a detailed reading of the three-sonnet sequence about Bloomfield, and the two-sonnet sequence, 'Old Poesy', Chirico traces the complex relationship Clare sees between the world of nature and the language used to describe it, showing how, for him, nature cannot be dissociated from its verbal description. Through these poems Clare not only pays tribute to neglected writers and articulates his protest against corrupted literary tastes, but compares natural regeneration with the sustenance of literary reputation through the reproduction of texts and the ongoing engagement of future readers.

Chirico develops his argument about Clare's uneasy relationship with contemporary literary culture and his anxiety about future reputation by discussing his attitude towards labour, learning and leisure in both prose and poetry. He argues that Clare exploits the limitations of time and place that were imposed upon him, for instance by devoting himself to archaeological and geological, as well as to agricultural, field work. And his well-attested interest in the quotidian and the particular is complicated by his persistent inquiries into the nature of literary posterity and the relationship between past and present. His friendships with Edmund Artis and Joseph Henderson fostered his fascination with those remains of the past that were to be found in the fields where he laboured: artefacts, ruins, fossils. Through a discussion of such poems as 'Narrative Verses Written after an Excursion from Helpstone to Burghley Park', 'Helpstone' and 'Elegy on the Ruins of Pickworth' Chirico shows how Clare combines his concern with the particularity of geographical place with his anxieties about his own social and cultural place. However fervently Clare longed to be part of the literary scene, his poetry shows a determination to be true to the rural culture that was his birthright. Those poems that are based on popular tales and superstitions—'The Fate of Amy', 'The Haunted Pond', 'January: a Cottage Evening'—concern another way in which the past leaves traces in the present: ghosts and hauntings. In chapter



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five Chirico develops his argument about Clare's attempt to authenticate a real rural culture by discussing his interest in the supernatural and his resistance to the evangelical sermonising of James Plumptre and Hannah More. Plumptre, a clergyman from Cambridgeshire, wrote to Clare urging him to develop his spiritual interests in a more conventionally Christian direction, and sent him some tracts from the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, including one by Hannah More and a sermon of his own. Encouraged by his publisher, Clare ignored Plumptre's strictures, insisting on the validity of a communal narrative tradition, one that is itself 'haunted' by his habitual allusions to earlier writers, but which also looks to the future in its obsession with the way in which such tales could reverberate through the imagination of the listener—or reader.

Another chapter is devoted to poetry in which Clare shows the de-familiarisation of landscapes that are transformed in one way or another by such natural phenomena as flood, snow, bright sunlight or darkening cloud. He also gives beguiling readings of 'Snow Storm' and 'The Hedge Woodbine', where the reader implicitly enters into the verse as observer of the natural scene, and a poem that at first appears to be simply a detailed description of part of the rural landscape can be read as a poem about the transforming (and questionable) power of the imagination.

As Chirico points out in the introductory chapter, Clare's complex relationship with his readers can be seen as starting with his relationship with his editors. After a discussion of the problems attending on the various versions of Clare's texts, printed or manuscript, Chirico declares his own pragmatic approach to textual authenticity. As a general rule he uses the now-standard Oxford edition, since that is the only printed edition of many of the poems, returning to manuscript sources only when led to do so by textual variants recorded in the Oxford edition. Occasionally he uses Taylor's printed version, as in the discussion of the sonnet, 'To the Memory of John Keats'. However, it is not made clear why this version should be preferred in this instance, since there is no comparison with other versions, either in manuscript or in the Oxford edition, and later in the chapter, there is a quotation from the version in the Oxford edition, which is acknowledged merely in a footnote. This is a small point, and would not be worth making, were it not for the controversy surrounding editorial practice (both then and now) in Clare studies. The complexity of the situation is admirably demonstrated in the concluding chapter, which is devoted to an extended analysis of 'To the Rural Muse'. For a start there were two poems published with this title in Clare's life-time. The first, three-stanza version, 'Simple enchantress, wreathd in summer blooms', was written early in 1820 and published in *The Village Minstrel* in 1821. Then in 1823 Clare sent Hessey three stanzas in a letter, where he writes of wanting to make 'an ardent apostrophe to the spirit of infancy' (quoted p.173). The Oxford editors have traced at least fourteen versions written in the twelve years following, that can be seen as preparation for the fifteen-stanza poem also called, 'To the Rural Muse', which was published in 1835. Chirico allows readers the chance to make comparisons by giving the three stanzas from the letter alongside the



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two stanzas in the Oxford edition (5 and 15) to which the first two stanzas in the letter most closely relate. The third stanza from the letter, traces of which can be seen in stanza 13 of the published long poem, is printed as a separate poem in *Early Poems II*, although the editors acknowledge, in *Middle Poems III*, that there is a connection between the manuscript stanza and 'To the Rural Muse'. All this may be an editor's nightmare, but it is evidence of both Clare's compulsive poetry-writing and of his move from spontaneous outpouring to fashioned artefact. It is also indicative of the importance to him of this particular subject: poetic inspiration and the poet's place in posterity.

It is good to have a study that ranges widely across the corpus of Clare's work, drawing attention to poems that have been little discussed or unpublished until Robinson and Powell's massive undertaking. Chirico's book teases out the subtleties, ambiguities and contradictions of poems that have often been thought to be simple and transparent. Having read his detailed analyses of poems familiar and unfamiliar, I find myself re-considering the implications of that much-quoted distich: 'I found the poems in the fields, /And only wrote them down' (*Later Poems, I*, 19). No longer does it read as a statement of poetic naivety, but, rather, as an expression of the way in which, for Clare, the natural scene is always mediated textually. Chirico has powerfully furthered the case for Clare as a poet of considerable sophistication, by illuminating the way in which he engages with both literary precursors and his own imagined readers.

*Valerie Pedlar*

*Peter DeWint 1784-1849: 'For the common observer of life and nature'*. Ed. by JOHN LORD. Aldershot: Lund Humphries. 2007. 208 pp. £20 paperback, £30 hardback.

The Collection, Lincoln, held a major exhibition of Peter DeWint's work between 1 June and 28 August 2007, and the exhibition was accompanied by a sumptuous catalogue which will be of permanent use and interest to all admirers of DeWint, and tangentially to those with an interest in John Clare. The catalogue begins with Clare's sonnet 'To De Wint' from *The Rural Muse* which, together with a detail from a DeWint landscape, occupies the whole of the page immediately after the title page, and Clare is referred to a number of times in the essays which form the first part of the catalogue.

The volume begins with an essay by John Lord, 'Peter DeWint's Life and Career', which summarises DeWint's biography and offers some general reflections on his work. The centrality of contemporary concerns with the sublime and the picturesque is emphasised, together with the importance of DeWint's choice of subjects which reflected those concerns. With some obvious exceptions, such as mountainous scenery, DeWint's subjects were very much the same as Clare's, another man much influenced by ideas of the picturesque. Lord also makes the valuable point that DeWint's output, in terms of subject matter, is much more varied than is often supposed. Although associated with Lincolnshire, he painted many scenes in northern England, and also many views close to London, where he was based. Nor was DeWint simply a landscape artist; architectural features



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figured prominently in his work.

The next essay, by Ian Waites, on 'Peter DeWint and the Lincolnshire Landscape', argues that DeWint defied the fashions of the day by painting views in Lincolnshire which 'went against the grain of what was considered at the time to be the culturally and socially acceptable "picturesque" places to paint'. Moreover, it was not only in the choice of subject matter that DeWint defied convention, but also in his style, both technically and in terms of composition; DeWint sought out landscapes which would 'conform to a private and highly individual aesthetic preference'. Waites suggests that DeWint had 'a unique aesthetic outlook that sees perhaps much in little, with an inclination towards simplicity and honesty. As such, DeWint's aesthetic perspective can be considered to be similar to that of the poet John Clare'. While DeWint, like Clare, was well aware of the changes that were taking place in the agricultural landscape, and could not ignore the fact that a whole way of life was disappearing, his paintings are more than mere records of the physical and social environment which was vanishing; his work was both idiosyncratic and innovative, and this enabled him to express the cultural complexity of the times.

John Ellis further explores DeWint's handling of agricultural change in a chapter entitled 'Enclosure, Drainage and DeWint in Lincolnshire'. He concludes that DeWint was very much aware of the changes which were occurring in the agricultural landscape and, despite being a fundamentally conservative man, 'disinclined to embrace change, the revolution was inexorable and was neither to be ignored nor denied'. He suggests that DeWint chose 'to address the reality of continuity and change together, and to accommodate change and subsume it within an essentially romantic view of the landscape without compromising his integrity'.

John Lord, in 'The Urban Man', points out that DeWint, despite his reputation as a painter of the rural scene, always lived in towns; he was born in Hanley, began his training in Stone, was apprenticed in London and lived there for the rest of his life, and was also a frequent visitor to Lincoln. However, in the early nineteenth century there was ready access to the countryside, even for dwellers in the capital, and the division between town and country was not so sharp as it is now; moreover, there were practical reasons for an artist to live in London. The urban scene found a place in DeWint's work; the early nineteenth century saw an increasing interest in, and appreciation of, medieval architecture, and the interest in architectural history is reflected in DeWint's paintings.

'Peter DeWint and the Victorians', by Jim Cheshire, discusses DeWint's artistic legacy, and its place in the aesthetic debates which took place in the later nineteenth century. Critics attempted to construct a narrative of the progress and development of English painting, and DeWint was regarded as sufficiently important to occupy a significant place in the story which was elaborated, while the prices paid for his paintings increased dramatically in the decades after his death.

In the last essay Peter Bower discusses 'Peter DeWint and Thomas Creswick's Paper'. With a rapidly enlarging selection of artist's papers to choose from, DeWint favoured those of Thomas Creswick. The essay



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discusses the possible reasons for this, and the implications for DeWint's drawing and painting. Finally among the preliminary matter, the catalogue reprints the very important 'A Short Memoir of the Life of Peter DeWint and William Hilton RA', written after their deaths by Hilton's sister and DeWint's wife, Harriet. This is a document from which much of our knowledge of the two artists derives, and it is mentioned many times in the essays discussed above, so it is good to have it readily accessible.

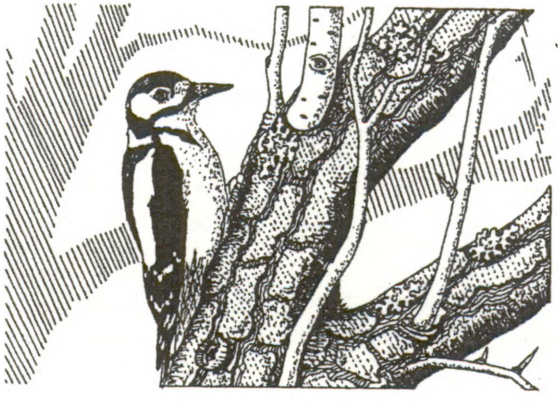
The catalogue itself illustrates and discusses the pictures which were included in the exhibition. The standard of reproduction is high, adding to the permanent value of the catalogue. I haven't laboured the parallels between Peter DeWint and John Clare, but it is a statement of the obvious to say that there were reasons for Clare's high opinion of DeWint's work. Although the exhibition is ended, the permanent display on DeWint's life and work at the Usher Gallery, Lincoln, now part of The Collection, always repays a visit and is a source of pleasure to any admirer of DeWint and of Clare.

*Bob Heyes*

*Robert Bloomfield: Selected Poems.* Ed. by JOHN GOODRIDGE and JOHN LUCAS. Nottingham: Trent Editions. 2007. viii + 195 pp. £9.99.

The first edition of this valuable selection was reviewed here in 1999 by Ronald Blythe. It now appears in a second edition, considerably longer than the first. The most significant change is the complete replacement of the unsatisfactory text of *The Farmer's Boy* which was used in that edition by one written from memory by Bloomfield in 1801, in an effort to reconstruct his original version of the poem as it existed before the editorial attentions of Capel Lofft. This manuscript is preserved in the Houghton Library at Harvard University and has not been printed before. Other changes include full texts of 'Good Tidings' and 'May Day with the Muses', of which only excerpts were included previously.

*Bob Heyes*





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# Contributors

TOM BATES is a sculptor based in Magill, South Australia. His accounts of and designs for his own sculpture project, 'Sketches for the Clare Cycle', featured in past issues of this journal (see *JCSJ*, 10 (1991) and 12 (1993). See also 13 (1994)). His marble and bronze plaque of the poet in profile is now sited in the John Clare Lecture Theatre, on the Clifton Campus of Nottingham Trent University.

PAUL FARLEY is Professor of Poetry at Lancaster University. His award-winning collections of poetry include *The Boy From The Chemist Is Here To See You* (Picador, 1998), *The Ice Age* (Picador, 2002), *Tramp in Flames* (Picador, 2006) and *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (British Film Institute, 2006). A regular presenter on BBC Radio, Paul has also written essays and reviews for *Granta, The Guardian, Poetry Review* and *Art Review*. His *John Clare: Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007) was reviewed in *JCSJ*, 26 (2007).

SCOTT HESS teaches in the English department at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, an American liberal arts college in the Quaker tradition. The ideas in this essay are part of a larger book project, 'William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship: Nature, Class, Aesthetics, and the Roots of Environmentalism', which will connect constructions of nature and art in the nineteenth century to today's environmental movement.

SCOTT MCEATHRON is Associate Professor of English at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, where he specializes in Romanticism and Nineteenth-Century British Literature. He has recently edited *English Labouring-Class Poets, 1800-1830* (Pickering and Chatto, 2006) and is serving as Program Chair of the John Clare Society of North America.

SARAH WEIGER is a PhD candidate at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. She studies Romanticism and is interested in natural history, aesthetics, ecocriticism and transatlantic studies. She is currently working on her thesis, '"The bird is the feeling": Romantic Natural History and its Subjects'.



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# Abbreviations

BY HIMSELF *John Clare By Himself*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell (Ashington and Manchester: Mid-NAG and Carcanet, 1996)

COTTAGE TALES *John Clare, Cottage Tales*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S. Dawson (Ashington and Manchester: Mid-NAG and Carcanet, 1993)

CRITICAL HERITAGE *Clare: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Mark Storey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973)

DEACON George Deacon, *John Clare and the Folk Tradition* (London: Sinclair Browne, 1983)

EARLY POEMS (I–II) *The Early Poems of John Clare*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (two volumes, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)

HAUGHTON Hugh Haughton, Adam Phillips and Geoffrey Summerfield (eds), *John Clare in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

JCSJ *The John Clare Society Journal* (1982–)

LATER POEMS *The Later Poems of John Clare*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (two volumes, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984)

LETTERS *The Letters of John Clare*, ed. Mark Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985)

MIDDLE PERIOD (I–II) *John Clare, Poems of the Middle Period 1822–1837*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S. Dawson (two volumes, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); (III–IV) (1998): (V) (2003)

MIDSUMMER CUSHION *John Clare, The Midsummer Cushion*, ed. Kelsey Thornton and Anne Tibble (Ashington and Manchester: Mid-NAG and Carcanet, revised edition, 1990)

NATURAL HISTORY *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare*, ed. Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983)

NORTHBOROUGH SONNETS *John Clare, Northborough Sonnets*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S. Dawson (Ashington and Manchester: Mid-NAG and Carcanet, 1995)

OXFORD AUTHORS *The Oxford Authors: John Clare*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)

PROSE *The Prose of John Clare*, ed. J.W. and Anne Tibble (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951, reprinted 1970)ß

SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR *John Clare, The Shepherd's Calendar*, ed. Eric Robinson, Geoffrey Summerfield and David Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, revised edition, 1993)

SUMMERFIELD *John Clare, Selected Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield (London: Penguin, 1990)



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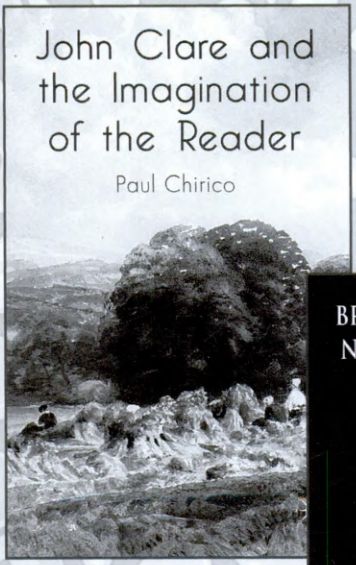


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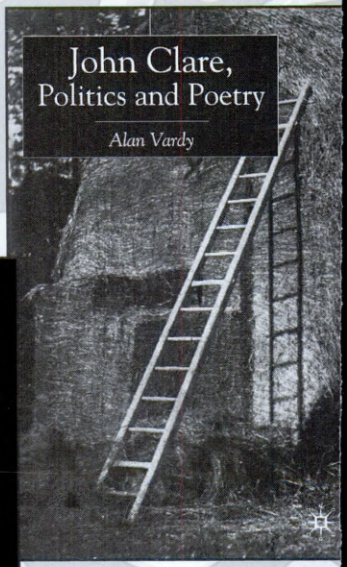


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